

Afaf Lutfi al-Sayyid-Marsot, Editor

# SOCIETY AND THE SEXES IN MEDIEVAL ISLAM

Sixth  
Giorgio Levi Della Vida  
Biennial Conference



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**GIORGIO LEVI DELLA VIDA CONFERENCES**

**Afaf Lutfi al-Sayyid-Marsot, General Editor**

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**Edited by**  
**AFAF LUTFI AL-SAYYID-MARSOT**

The Giorgio Levi Della Vida Medal of the Gustave E. von Grunebaum Center for Near Eastern Studies, University of California, Los Angeles, is awarded biennially to give recognition to an outstanding scholar whose work has significantly and lastingly advanced the study of Islamic civilization. The field is understood to include antecedents and interaction with historically connected centers of civilization. The scholar is selected by a committee appointed by the chancellor of the University of California, Los Angeles, meeting under the chairmanship of the director of the Gustave E. von Grunebaum Center for Near Eastern Studies. The studies are most creative and effective if integrated with other historical and social science research.

The award carries with it a bronze medal and a prize of money together with the obligation to present in person a formal lecture at the University of California, Los Angeles, as part of a conference. The recipient of the award chooses the theme and selects the other participants to the conference. The proceedings of each conference are published in a special series, of which this volume is the sixth.

The first award was made on May 12, 1967, to Professor Robert Brunschvig of the Sorbonne, Paris, by a committee under the chairmanship of Professor G. E. von Grunebaum, who originated the conference. Subsequent recipients were Professors Joseph Schacht of Columbia University, Francesco Gabrieli of the University of California, Los Angeles, and Shlomo Dov Goitein of the Institute for Advanced Study, Princeton.

This volume and its predecessors owe what technical perfection they may possess very largely to the care bestowed on them by Teresa Joseph, Principal Editor, Gustave E. von Grunebaum Center for Near Eastern Studies.

Five volumes have been published to date: *Logic in Classical Islamic Culture* (1970), *Theology and Law in Islam* (1971), *Arabic Poetry: Theory and Development* (1973), *Islam and Cultural Change in the Middle Ages* (1975), and *Individualism and Conformity in Classical Islam* (1977).

## SOCIETY AND THE SEXES IN MEDIEVAL ISLAM





Giorgio Levi Della Vida  
1886-1967

**SOCIETY AND THE SEXES  
IN MEDIEVAL ISLAM**

Edited by

**AFAF LUTFI AL-SAYYID-MARSOT**

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## **PRESENTATION OF AWARD TO SIXTH RECIPIENT, FRANZ ROSENTHAL**

**AFAF LUTFI AL-SAYYID-MARSOT**

**University of California, Los Angeles**

Relationships between the sexes have ever been a source of fascination to mankind. They form the foundation of literature, mythology, religion, and the arts. The first love story of the Judaeo-Christian world, that of Adam and Eve, is also the first lesson in sociology, history, and psychology. Similarly, the Muslim world has been equally forthcoming in accounts of human relationships. These accounts help to refine and hone our empathy with, if not our understanding of, the past which is, after all, the essence of history.

In the past historians wrote of rulers and ideals. They were concerned with the elite, and mankind in general was relegated to the position of an extra in a scene where the protagonists were kings and prime ministers, and their dialogue came straight from the archives. Today historians write in a more realistic vein taking into account human foibles, economic conditions, psychological tensions, the general along with the particular, *Alf Layla wa Layla* and *Ihya' 'ulum al-Din*. Mankind—in the sense in which “man” embraces “woman”—is the main character. All information concerning human beings is now grist to the mill of scholars; “sermons” are certainly found in stones although “good” does not necessarily enter into the picture. Because of this stress on the human element we have turned our scholarly attention to the most basic connections in the social chain. Sociology and anthropology have led us to investigate the family and its relationships, sexual mores, child-rearing practices, customs, and usage in order to grasp the essence of society. Psychology has opened our eyes to the existence of the hidden mind and has forced us to inquire into the elements that motivate human behavior. More recently psycho-historians have awakened us to the potential understanding of historical events through psychological probing. In so doing, these fields have moved the relationships between individuals out of the domain of the private into the public, out of the bedroom and the marketplace into the classroom, as valid and valuable branches of knowledge.

How a people looks upon social relationships—the admirable and the reprehensible as poles of behavior—is a clue to understanding that society. And while we all know that the behavior of real people falls somewhat in between



absolute vice and absolute virtue, we also need to trace the parameters of their social perceptions. By understanding what and why an act is *makruh* we can fully appreciate what in consequence is *hasan* or *mustahab*, presumably not out of prurient curiosity or voyeurism, but in an effort to grasp the underpinnings of a society.

When Professor Franz Rosenthal, the recipient of the sixth Giorgio Levi Della Vida award, proposed "Society and the Sexes in Medieval Islam" as the theme of the conference, he was thus not only being in the vanguard of modern historical research, but also reaching out to examine the most basic level of human relationships. But then, he has accustomed his readers to expect the unexpected, even the unusual, as a field of inquiry. His previous works have dealt with *Humor in Early Islam* (1956), *The Muslim Concept of Freedom* (1960), *The Herb: Hashish Versus Medieval Muslim Society* (1971), and *Gambling in Islam* (1975). His academic interests, always varied and vast, have spread from Semitics to translations of Ibn Khaldun's *Muqqadima* (1958), from *A History of Muslim Historiography* (1952) to *Essays on Art and Literature in Islam* (1971).

The other participants in this conference, who were all selected personally by Professor Rosenthal, have each chosen his or her subject matter as an exercise in some aspect of human relationships, be it sacred or profane, normal or deviant. And while some of us may have been taken aback, and even offended, at the subject matter of some of the essays, we must recognize the fact that different standards apply to different times in history, and that efforts in any field of endeavor are valid as long as they are motivated by the constant search for knowledge, which is the hallmark of the scholar.

# **FICTION AND REALITY: SOURCES FOR THE ROLE OF SEX IN MEDIEVAL MUSLIM SOCIETY**

FRANZ ROSENTHAL

Yale University

Medieval Muslim intellectuals delighted in categorizing the pleasures of this world in poetry and prose. One author tells us that the pleasures are six in number and affect all the senses: food, drink, clothing, sex, scent, and sound. The most excellent and most important pleasure, he says, is clearly—food. He has a good point. Of all the pleasures, food is the only one absolutely essential for the individual. But we should not overlook the fact that the quoted statement comes from the introductory remarks of a thirteenth-century cookbook.<sup>1</sup> Authors concerned with other subjects would have indicated different preferences, and there were expectedly many occasions for praising sexual enjoyment as the greatest of human pleasures.<sup>2</sup>

Our knowledge of medieval Muslim society depends almost exclusively upon literary sources. Fortunately, they are plentiful and of a very wide range. These sources allow us to gain some perception of the relationship between individual and society in matters of sexual attitudes and morality. The problem to which I wish to address myself here is the manner and extent to which such sociological knowledge can be gleaned from some genres of literature.

The underlying dilemmas in that relationship are as universal as they are fundamental. One of them is quite simply that human society and civilization require for their very existence a certain amount of regulation of sexual expression. Whatever its degree, the individual will have to submit to it, and he may easily feel oppressed by it and tempted to circumvent it. The other dilemma results from the fact that what is seen as being of benefit to society is not always considered by the individual as being of benefit to him. Sociologists nowadays never tire of reminding us of the importance of this fact. In very short order I have come across statements such as "Policy designed to maximize benefits to the

<sup>1</sup> Muḥammad b. al-Ḥasan al-Kātib al-Baghdādī, *Kitāb al-Ṭabīkh*, ed. F. al-Bārūdī (Beirut, 1964), p. 9, trans. A. J. Arberry, in *Islamic Culture*, XIII (1939), 32.

<sup>2</sup> Cf., for instance, the beginning of the *Jawāmi' al-ladhdha* (below, p. 16)



individual may not maximize the welfare of the community," and "The central dilemma . . . is that the aggregate of reasonable individual desires is a societal nightmare."<sup>3</sup> We may add that *unreasonable* desires, even if they seem tolerable in small numbers of individuals, are all the more likely in the end to cause such uneasiness to society.

Throughout history, societies everywhere have established elaborate sets of moral rules, often of an irrational or seemingly irrational character. They will no doubt continue to do so in the future, no matter how different the rules may turn out to be. The perfect system has obviously not yet been devised, and presumably never will be.

The established rules of sexual morality and institutions in a given society have commonly been subjected to friendly or hostile—rarely impartial—evaluation, both from within that society and from other societies in contact with it. Value judgments are even more suspect in this connection than they are with respect to other social phenomena. Emotional involvement is inevitably added to the always present influence of general political and intellectual currents. It is hardly surprising that for centuries Islam and Christianity were highly critical of each other's moral views. This has changed in recent times, although the old tradition lingers on. Western scholarship at least has come to take a generally favorable view of the Muslim system as reflected in the theoretical, ideal guidelines of religion and law. It is now a much repeated commonplace that Islam is a "sex positive" religion and society, in contrast with the pervasive negative attitude attributed to traditional Christianity. A European medievalist, R. W. Southern, describes the situation in these terms: "To Western ideals essentially celibate, sacerdotal, and hierarchical, Islam opposed the outlook of a laity frankly indulgent and sensual, in principle egalitarian, enjoying a remarkable freedom of speculation, with no priests and monasteries built into the basic structure of society as they were in the West."<sup>4</sup> Islamicists cannot avoid feeling that some sleight of hand is involved here; theory and practice on either side are mixed in unequal amounts to sharpen the contrast. Southern's description, however, would appear fundamentally sound to many people today. Instead of "sex positive" and "sex negative" one might perhaps prefer a more moderate definition. Islam always took care to admit that sexuality existed as a problematic element in the relationship of individuals and society and never hesitated to leave room for the discussion of approval or disapproval. Traditional Christianity was inclined to pretend that sexuality's legitimate right of existence was limited, and further discussion was to be avoided as much as possible.

<sup>3</sup> Both statements appeared during the space of less than a year in the *Bulletin* of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, XXX, 2 (1976), 22, and XXX, 5 (1977), 14. The first is by A. Zolberg, in connection with population problems, and the second by D. Bell, with respect to technology and environment.

<sup>4</sup> R. W. Southern, *Western Views of Islam in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge, Mass., 1972), p. 7.

The shift in favor of Islam in the balance of scholarly judgment is primarily due to modern developments in Western civilization which have culminated in present-day views that ascribe to sexuality a decisive role in all human affairs. Modern Muslim writers have naturally felt the effect of these views. A recent study by the Tunisian Abdelwahab Bouhdiba contains valuable insights.<sup>5</sup> Yet its dominant theme is a sort of paean to the harmonious equilibrium achieved in Islam between sexuality and religious sanctity. The study pays no regard to the numerous counterforces that were at work putting the relationship between religion and sex on a different level. It was not only strongly entrenched asceticism that stressed their mutual exclusiveness. An old anecdote tells of the aristocratic Muslim and a woman he fell in love with at first sight. It happened at the Ka'ba, which is often the fictional setting for emphatic statements on morality.<sup>6</sup> He went up to her and recited the verse:

I have a great passion for my religion while I like pleasures.  
How can I have a passion for pleasures as well as Islam?

The lady replied: "Leave the one, and you will have the other." It may, or may not, mean something that in another version of the story it was the lady who made the advances, and the pious gentleman the one who used the verse, and a continuation of it, to rebuke her.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Abdelwahab Bouhdiba, *La sexualité en Islam* (Paris, 1975). Bouhdiba's bibliography reveals a paucity of serious contemporary Arabic works on the subject in both its historical and substantive aspects.

<sup>6</sup> Cf., for instance, below, n. 47, or the fictitious case of compound transgression, of a man fornicating with his mother in the Ka'ba while both are fasting in Ramaḍān, to be found in 'Izz ad-Dīn Ibn 'Abd as-Salām, *Qawā'id al-aḥkām fī maṣāliḥ al-anām*, ed. Ṭ. R. Sa'd (Cairo, 1388/1968), II, 108. The quotation in Ibn al-Ukhūwa, *Ma'ālim al-qurba*, ed. R. Levy (London 1938), pp. 33 f., trans., p. 11, may be a somewhat shortened and slightly toned-down version of this passage, rather than being derived from another work of Ibn 'Abd as-Salām, which, however, is not excluded. The title in Ibn al-Ukhūwa is *al-Fawā'id fī l-maṣāliḥ wa-l-maṣā'id*; *fawā'id* appears to be a substitution for *qawā'id*. The incipit of the published text agrees with that indicated for Ibn 'Abd as-Salām's *al-Qawā'id aṣ-ṣuḡhrā* by Ḥajjī Khalīfa, *Kaṣṣ al-aṣṣuḡhrā*, ed. Şerefettin Yaltkaya (Istanbul, 1941-1943), col. 1360.

<sup>7</sup> Ibn al-Jawzī, *Dhamm al-hawā* (Cairo, 1381/1962), pp. 24 f. In Ibn al-Jawzī's versions, the Muslim nobleman was 'Abdallāh b. Ḥasan b. Ḥasan, no doubt the great-grandson of 'Alī who perished during the reign of al-Manṣūr. His date of death is given as 145/763 by Abū l-Faraj al-Iṣfahānī, *Maqātil al-Ṭālibīyīn* (Cairo, 1368/1949), p. 196. Ibn al-Jawzī's *isnād* suggests as written sources one of the works of Ibn al-Marzubān (d. 309/921-922) for the first version, and 'Umar b. Shabba (d. 263/876, or 264) for the second. The additional verse in the second version reads:

My soul has made this world and its attraction attractive for me,  
But my inner voice warns me of death and turns me off.

Another version depicts the woman as someone who just happened to pass by when the



If Paradise was depicted as the perfect repository of all sensual pleasures, it was first and foremost an affirmation of their true role in human life. It was a recognition of the fact that, no matter how desirable that might be, they could not be eradicated from it. Without question, simple people as a rule continued to believe that Paradise was to compensate them for what they had missed on earth. Thoughtful individuals, however, would wonder why the pleasures of Paradise were so much in conflict with what the Law considered beneficial for the individual and society on earth. They would argue that those pleasures were possible in Paradise only because their harmful and corruptive aspects were no longer operative in the other world.<sup>8</sup> Another approach, among the many that were attempted, was, for example, taken by the Zāhirite Ibn Ḥazm. Since for him revelation, and not reason, decides what is allowed and what is forbidden, he can simply dodge the issue and refuse to consider the argument that it would be absurd for God to forbid indulgence in certain pleasures on earth but permit them in Paradise.<sup>9</sup> Thus, the sensual Paradise became to a large degree a symbol for society's misapprehensions about sensual pleasure on earth. Such speculations imply an awareness of the disruptive potential of sexuality for the smooth functioning of the social order, rather than that glowing affirmation of sexuality one may be tempted to see in the pleasures of Paradise under the influence of modern ideas.

That influence is pervasive and very real. It greatly complicates our search for historical insight. Let me give another example. It concerns the aspect of our problem which has always been considered the single most important criterion for the special complexion of Muslim society, the position of women. The famous passage of Usāmah b. Munqidh on the coarse freedom of Frankish women shows that on occasion Muslims themselves were aware of the difference of their society in this respect.<sup>10</sup> Whatever the actual situation, the theory as mirrored in medieval Muslim writings was saturated with negative views. They might once have been taken for granted and passed unnoticed in the West. Today, we are conditioned to suspect and perceive "male sexism," to use a current term, even where the professed attitude on the whole seems to be positive. For instance, the Ṣāhib Ibn

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Ṭālibid 'Alī b. 'Abdallāh al-Ja'farī, who was still alive in the time of the caliph al-Mutawakkil, was reciting the verse, see Abū l-Faraj al-Iṣfahānī, *Kitāb al-Aghānī* (Būlāq, 1285/1868), XIX, 142, whose informant was Muḥammad b. al-'Abbās al-Yazīdī (d. 310/922, or 313; one wonders why al-Yazīdī, who was born in the early forties of the ninth century, should have needed two informants between himself and al-Ja'farī). As always in the case of such anecdotes, it is difficult or impossible for us to reconstruct the earliest stage of their literary fixation.

<sup>8</sup> Aṣ-Ṣafadī, *Waṣfī*, Vol. II, ed. S. Dederling (Istanbul, 1949), pp. 84 f.

<sup>9</sup> Ibn Ḥazm, *al-Iḥkām fī uṣūl al-aḥkām* (Cairo, 1345-1348/1926-1929), I, 55; (Cairo, n.d.), I, 50.

<sup>10</sup> Usāmah b. Munqidh, *ʿIṭbār*, trans. P. K. Hitti, *An Arab-Syrian Gentleman and Warrior* (New York, 1929), pp. 164 f.

'Abbād wrote one of his well-crafted compositions for use on the occasion of the birth of a baby girl. He is profuse in his praise of the many Arabic words that are feminine in grammatical gender and at the same time designate what is most important and beneficial in human affairs. Life itself is feminine, and without it, bodies would not be active and mankind would be unknown. Paradise, which is also feminine, has been promised to the pious, and it is the reason why the prophets were sent to mankind, and so on. It is all in the spirit of al-Mutanabbī's famous verses:

Were all women like this one, women would surely be thought to excel men.  
Being feminine is no blemish for the sun, nor is being masculine a matter of  
pride for the moon.

For a brief moment we are happy to think that a famous wit and *littérateur*, who also was a powerful statesman, for once comes out squarely against common prejudice. But then we realize that the Ṣāhib also counsels his imaginary addressee to be happy and cheerful. He hails the baby girl as the herald of many *brothers* to follow. No particular subtlety is required to see that the entire exercise was meant to serve as a letter of consolation for someone who had the misfortune of being blessed with a girl instead of a boy.<sup>11</sup>

There is no need here to belabor the elementary truth that nobody can step outside his own immediate cultural boundaries, as little, to use another cliché, as Archimedes could argue from postulates disregarding physical realities. Cross-cultural value judgments are always based on preconceptions. This should not discourage us from making them. Our first task, however, is ascertaining the data on which judgments may be based. In our field of study, this task is far from being accomplished. Whatever can be said at this time is quite limited and impressionistic.

The sources we have for learning about the way medieval Muslim society faced the demands of human sexuality are many and varied. At the same time, they leave us with an acute sense of dissatisfaction and uncertainty. The compass of time and space, of people and customs, is too large, and, as compared with it, the coverage provided by literature is too sparse. Meaningful statistical evaluation seems out of the question. It may be suggested, though, that valid results might be obtained from intelligent statistical analyses, asking the proper questions, of the frequency of references across the vast literature and within the work of individual authors. To my knowledge this approach has not yet been tried. Considering its enormous difficulties, it may indeed not be realistically feasible at this time.

It is tempting to project observations from the contemporary scene backward

<sup>11</sup> Ath-Tha'libī, *Yatīmat ad-dahr* (Damascus, 1304/1886), III, 83 f. Al-Mutanabbī wrote the poem in 337/end of 948 at the death of Sayf ad-Dawla's mother. He spoke of "the one we have lost" which the Ṣāhib of necessity replaced by "like this one." Cf. al-Ḥuṣrī, *Zahr* (Cairo, 1389/1969), I, 347 f.



into the past. This is being done occasionally, but it is a dubious and dangerous procedure, especially in areas highly vulnerable to the leveling influence of common humanity. It has been my experience that any historical study of expressions of basic human instincts ultimately reaches the point where the very existence of differences due to time and environment seems questionable or, at any rate, the differences appear to be minimal and irrelevant. The more one learns, the stronger is the temptation to be satisfied with the impression that sameness outweighs difference. Using the present when studying the past can only add to obscuring differences and blurring contrasts that the historian seeks to discover. For reliable guidance, we must painstakingly collect and evaluate the information available in the old sources.

The conflict between what the individual considers beneficial to himself and what is beneficial to society was not one to be discussed as such in medieval Muslim literature, certainly not in these terms. The reasons are obvious. Individuals lived for society and were seen as one with it. Societal norms were firmly established on a religious basis. If the individual was not satisfied with them, it was his duty to adjust to them. Everything concerned with eroticism was considered a strictly personal, totally individual matter. As much as anything in Islamic theory, it was to be left to individual choice. But it would have been considered preposterous to assume that it could in any way affect, let alone alter, the accepted norms of society.

The religious and legal literature was, of course, cognizant of the existence of the potential for conflict between individual and society and gives much information about it in what it says and, perhaps more, in what it does not say.

Philosophical thought in the Greek tradition was content with adjusting abstract ideals to no less abstract Muslim religious norms. The Platonic ideal state, for instance, as seen by Ibn Sīnā, relies upon preferably monogamous marriage as its firmest pillar. The family is the official institution that serves to produce progeny and to assure the preservation of property. In it, man is the provider. The wife should be satisfied with what the husband provides. She contributes her proper share to the upbringing of the children, whereas the husband's duty is to provide the material support for them. There may be valid reasons for divorce, but the marriage ties should never be easily broken. Any other sexual activity detracts from the ideal and should be outlawed as socially harmful and futile.<sup>12</sup> Ibn Sīnā, brief as he is, was still a bit more explicit than al-Fārābī had been before him in his discussion of the ideal human society. And a complete description of the human condition as Ibn Ṭufayl's *Ḥayy b. Yaqzān* purports to be almost totally disregards the existence of male and female in order to stress the unimportance of matter and all its works.

<sup>12</sup> Ibn Sīnā, *Kitāb ash-Shifā', Ilāhiyāt* ed. I. Madkour and others (Cairo, 1380/1960), II, 447-451. Ibn Sīnā was used by Ibn Naṭīs, *Theologus Autodidactus*, ed. M. Meyerhof and J. Schacht (Oxford, 1968), pp. 34 f., trans., pp. 61 f.

The philosophical view of the fundamental undesirability of sexual expression rules out serious consideration of it as a factor determining society. For the Ikhwān aṣ-Ṣafā', love is the primary force that makes the world go round, and is responsible for all worthwhile associations. The Ikhwān do not completely overlook physical aspects. They give them, however, a small and insignificant part in the whole scheme. For them, it is the one aspect of love that it would be easy and most convenient to dispense with.<sup>13</sup>

When aṭ-Ṭawḥīdī asked Miskawayh for the reason why there is universal admiration for beauty, he couched the question in physical terms, mostly from the language of poetry, such as longing, gazing, loving, yearning, sleeplessness, and vivid imaginings. Are we dealing, he asked, with "physical effects, or psychological developments, or intellectual processes, or spiritual preserves, or are we dealing with haphazard matters not depending on cause and effect?" Miskawayh sensed the drift of the question and therefore made a special effort to play down the physical element and stress its subordinate role.<sup>14</sup> But we should not forget that in the same circle of thinkers and writers, man may be exhorted at one time to "be by means of his nature a virtuous person, by means of his soul a higher [nonterrestrial] body, and by means of his intellect a self-sufficient god."<sup>15</sup> Yet, at another time, it was said that he should be aware of his mortality and realize that

The pleasure of life is animal pleasure,  
And not what the philosophers say it is.<sup>16</sup>

The ascetic and antimaterial trend is prominent in the literature dealing with

<sup>13</sup> *Rasā'il Ikhwān aṣ-Ṣafā'* (Cairo, 1347/1928), III, 268 f. A rather unusual expression of the idea of the irrelevancy of sexuality seems to exist in the list of homosexuals among prominent early Muslims going back, apparently, to al-Madā'inī. It is preceded in the source that quotes it by a statement credited to al-Madā'inī to the effect that "manliness (*murūwa*) is not wickedness and immorality but food spread out, presents given, modesty known, and harm not done." The list is, it seems, not meant as something to slander politically objectionable individuals, but, if it is to be connected with the statement on *murūwa*, is meant as an illustration of the insignificance of sexual inclination for the determination of personal worth. This is admittedly an uncertain speculation, for we cannot say whether al-Madā'inī had made the connection between *murūwa* and the list, or what purpose he, or the original compiler, had in mind. See R. Sellheim, ed., *Die Gelehrtenbiographien des Abū 'Ubaidallāh al-Marzubānī* (Wiesbaden, 1964), pp. 183 f. According to J. Kraemer, the list also appears in Ibn Durayd, *Wishāh*, see *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft*, CX (1961), 271. Part of the description of *murūwa* is found in al-Bīrūnī, *Jamāhir* (Hyderabad, 1355/1936), p. 10, as I learn from the *Wörterbuch der klassischen arabischen Sprache*, Vol. K, 247b.

<sup>14</sup> At-Ṭawḥīdī and Miskawayh, *al-Hawāmil wa-sh-shawāmil*, ed. A. Amīn and as-Sayyid A. Ṣaqr (Cairo, 1370/1951), pp. 140-143, cf. pp. 242 f.

<sup>15</sup> At-Ṭawḥīdī, *Muqābasāt*, 62d *muqābasa*, ed. Ḥ. as-Sandūbī (Cairo, 1347/1929), p. 252; ed. M. T. Ḥusayn (Baghdād, 1970), p. 255.



abstract thought, whether philosophical or religious and mystical. It would be as easy to contend that it had no influence beyond a certain, albeit large, elite group, as that it represented the dominant attitude of Muslim society as a whole. Those who articulated this trend occupied some of society's most influential positions. There can be no denying that their views left their mark on it, but the constant insistence upon and radical advocacy of these views raises some doubt as to how effective they were in reality.

Among the most promising sources for our quest are all those works which were not professedly ideological when they touched upon the subject of sex, and which were always tolerated as vehicles of unconventional thought. These works constitute the various genres of popular and entertaining literature. There is, of course, no way to escape from conventionality even in being unconventional. In their flights of the imagination, these works managed to stay close to accepted morality and at the same time be on occasion highly critical of it.

The products of popular and entertaining literature addressed themselves to the unpretentious many and to the sophisticated seekers of intellectual stimulation. Relaxation—the momentary freedom from the duties and restraints imposed by reality—was their principal line of defense against attacks upon their right to exist in a world that gives man his only chance to work for eternal bliss and should therefore be soberly employed only for serious ends as determined by established societal norms. Any kind of entertaining literature in poetry or prose was usually stated to be a temporary diversion from stress and strain. It was acceptable as a means to keep hearts and minds from getting dull and rusty through too much work. Furthermore, those who had no hearts and minds to speak of, those who were considered insufficiently prepared by natural endowment for coping with life's reality, such as women and children, the simple minded and the uneducated, were good customers for the lesser products of this literature. Only little of it was adjudged to be of value for moral instruction. Perhaps, the best-known view expressing the objectionable facet of belles lettres is the one that distinguished among various types of poetry and declared some of them morally unsuitable, and that not only for women and children.<sup>17</sup> We are thus forewarned to exercise caution in looking for social significance in the evidence for sexual attitudes provided by fiction. It may often highlight the unusual and thereby distort rather than illuminate reality. Much depends again on whether we put the stress on the expressed and, more often, implied flouting of official societal norms or on the noticeable deference to them.

<sup>16</sup> The verses are ascribed to Abū Sulaymān al-Manṣūrī as-Sijistānī, cf. Ibn Abī Uṣaybi'a, *Uyūn al-anbā'*, ed. A. Müller (Cairo and Königsberg, 1882-1884), I, 322; aṣ-Ṣafadī, *Wāfi*, Vol. III, ed. S. Dederling (Damascus, 1953), p. 166.

<sup>17</sup> The legal view expressed it precisely: "With respect to the recital of Arab poems, those that mention immorality, wine, and youths are disapproved because they mention shameful behavior," cf. Qāḍikhān, *Fatāwī* (Calcutta, 1835), IV, 379 f.

Poetry is famous for being the most prolific product of the Arabic and Muslim imagination. It cannot be entirely passed over here, though I can be brief. Others are much better qualified to speak about poetry than I am. Sheer bulk adds to the difficulty of extracting general statements on poetry as a source for living moral attitudes. Much that ought to be considered has hardly been investigated from our point of view. Much is still locked away in manuscripts. It does not facilitate our task that Muslim literary theory was very much taken with the concept of "the best poetry being the most deceptive one," which has recently been studied in great depth by J. C. Bürgel.<sup>18</sup> On a less abstract level, we hear, for instance, that al-Mubarrad expressed the opinion in connection with the poetry of Abū Nuwās that "quite a few poets say things openly in their poems which are the opposite of what they leave unexpressed."<sup>19</sup> Thus, the problem of how much weight can be attributed to apparent social implications of poetical statements is complicated, quite apart from such ambiguities as the ones created by the mystical poets' constant metaphorical use of erotic images and language. We must also be on the alert for the distorting effects of poetical traditionalism which conflicted with the desire for originality. Not infrequently, it led to ever more daring, even outrageous, modifications of erotic themes, something with which we are regrettably familiar from modern fictional literature. On the other hand, traditionalism not only served as an excuse for unconventional behavior but also masked the true character of a poet's commitment.

These obstacles to sociological understanding appear all the more unfortunate when we recall I. Goldziher's remark that in Islam "we find the phenomenon of a people's poetry being for centuries a living protest against its religion."<sup>20</sup> Goldziher spoke of wine poetry, but it is indeed obvious that most love poetry was at variance with moral norms commonly accepted in Islam, at least since 'Abbāsid times. The simple description of a man making love to a woman, with the audience being left in doubt as to their legal status, was already quite contrary to official morality. Personal satire continued an ancient tradition and went far beyond permissible decency in its use of scurrilous slander. Poets no doubt did not hesitate to stand up in the right company and recite such verses. We can also be quite sure that some poets practiced what they spoke about in their poetry and defied conventional mores in the way they lived, and we would not need the

<sup>18</sup> "Die beste Dichtung ist die lügenreichste," *Oriens*, XXIII-XXIV (1970-71), 7-102.

<sup>19</sup> *Jamā'atun min-a-sh-shu'arā'i yuḍmirūna fī ash'ārihim khilāfa mā yuḥirūna*, cf. Ibn Falīta (?), *Rushd al-labīb*, MS Istanbul Topkapısarayı Ahmet III 2486, fol. 58a; MS Yale L-114, fol. 53a. The edition and translation by Mohamed Zouber Djabri (Erlangen, 1968) was not available to me. From *Current Work in the History of Medicine*, 92 (Oct.-Dec. 1976), I learn that parts of the work were treated in Erlangen dissertations by A. Husni-Pasha (1975), B. al-Khourī (1975), and G. al-Bayati (1976).

<sup>20</sup> I. Goldziher, *Muslim Studies*, Eng. trans. C. R. Barber and S. M. Stern (London, 1967-1971), I, 35. In early Islamic times, a poet excused himself for his verses on wine in these words: "I had too much to say, and therefore spoke as poets do" (*ibid.*).



ample indications we have from literature to assure us that the life-style ostensibly advocated by them was also practiced at times by others.

The word "protest" used by Goldziher is certainly appropriate. Many poets might have denied the intent to protest, but the workings of the poetical imagination, regardless of the realities that might have inspired it, registered a protest against prescribed social attitudes. The point at issue is again the extent to which the poetical imagination reflected feelings and attitudes shared by the people in general. Poetry possessed vast public appeal beyond literary coteries and the leadership elite which were its primary audience. It can be assumed that poets expressed sentiments widely shared by and typical of society as a whole. Their sentiments, however, were not indicative of any large-scale open rejection of norms that were accepted as the proper guidelines for individual behavior. They remained, so to speak, a silent protest, confirming acceptance of, if not satisfaction with, things as they were.

It would be nonsensical to argue that there is anything the poets say about sexual behavior that did not have its large role in reality. The apparent closeness of spiritual to earthly love in poetry is a familiar phenomenon much commented upon. The great Ibn 'Arabī often expressed his mystic ideas in fervent, erotic imagery. Now, he had a son who wrote erotic verses that were clearly meant to be anything but mystical. The fictional eroticism of both father and son must be taken as true reflections of social experience. The religiously charged environment in which the elder Ibn 'Arabī moved in Syria was complemented by another sort of environment in which his son moved and in which probably almost anything went, if within anxiously watched limits of outward propriety.

The palpable and pervasive respect for propriety usually felt mutes the protest proclaimed by the imagination. Poetry allows some glimpses at a reality very different from the official ideal, a small and in its total significance minor slice of reality. Most importantly it confirms that the desire for erotic expression beyond that approved by society was always alive.

A much smaller but significant part of fictional entertaining literature is the prose romance. Much less demanding than poetry and other literary genres, it had a large popular following. It appealed to the young and helped to shape their perception of life. Moreover it can be assumed to have tempered imagination with a certain regard for the level of experience of its mass audience. Nearly all Arabic prose romances are concerned with heroic warfare. They were intended to give religious and political inspiration. Eroticism as such has little room in them. Therefore, it is all the more interesting that a large number of daring erotic episodes is found incorporated in them. The *Futūḥ ash-Shām*, the novelistic elaboration of the edifying theme of the Muslim conquest of Syria, for example, is of quite recent date in its published form,<sup>21</sup> but the basic materials of the

<sup>21</sup> I used the text of the *Futūḥ ash-Sha'm* printed in Cairo in 1354/1935.

compilation are certainly medieval. In it, we find women and children ghosting in the background. That was their traditional role when men fought the good and bloody fight. But at regular intervals, we also find women very much in the foreground of action, much more so than is warranted by the actual history of even the early years of Islam.

We see the women of the enemy whose fate it is to learn new domestic duties, the better to serve the conquerors.<sup>22</sup> Then, there are the interfaith love incidents created by the religious conflict. They drag out over many pages. The wife or sweetheart refuses to accept the new religion adopted by her man when he becomes separated from her. She remains Christian, he searches for her, they fight, she kills herself, he is offered a beautiful captive who turns out to be the daughter of the Christian Emperor (*Futūḥ*, I, 51-56). More frequently, the girl is given a positive role. The daughter of the lord of Aleppo was desired by the son of the lord of 'Azāz when they all were still Christians. When she converted to Islam, it inspired him, too, to adopt Islam to win her hand, to be instrumental in the assassination of his own Christian father, and so on—it is a long story (I, 186 f.). At times, it seems as if the ancient motif of love transcending political barriers is made to serve far beyond the call of historical and fictional duty, and the Muslim success appears to derive primarily from the valor and innocence of noble maidens in the enemy camp.<sup>23</sup>

From the erotic point of view, the motifs border occasionally on the risqué: a princess has a secret love affair, gives birth to a boy, abandons him, the foundling is brought up like a prince by another king, sent off to be married to his mother (neither, of course, knowing about the relationship), is captured by the Muslims, his intended bride/mother enters the Muslim camp pretending to have converted, is told by the Arab leader that the Prophet had revealed to him in a dream that the young man was in reality her son, mother and son recognize each other, both become Muslims, she delivers her royal father's castle into the hands of the Muslims (II, 75-82). Or, a princess defeats all suitors in the stadium, is appointed commander of the anti-Muslim forces, falls in love with a prince in the army, declares her love to him, is found out by a cousin of hers who in turn had fallen in love with her, the cousin seizes her, declares himself in favor of the Muslim cause, helps the Muslims in their enterprise while, I am sorry to report, the girl disappears from the story for about a dozen pages; she eventually also converts to Islam and is married off to the cousin (II, 84-98). Here we have potential incest, free love, female masculinity, but everything is handled most properly and leads to the proper Muslim denouement according to accepted social norms.

Even more significant is the part played by Muslim women. There are mys-

<sup>22</sup> The captured daughter of the Bīrīq is given to 'Abdallāh b. Ja'far who teaches her (Arabic) cooking; she was already expert in Persian and Byzantine cooking, cf. *ibid.*, I, 66.

<sup>23</sup> Even the huris in Paradise make converts by appearing to high-ranking Christians in dreams (*ibid.*, II, 59).



terious knights in shining armor, fighting heroically. When approached, they turn out to be women, the sister of one Muslim leader (I, 27-33), the wife of another (I, 44-47, 79), showing their faithfulness and devotion to brother or husband and in a way outperforming them in effectiveness in the cause of Islam. And for a dozen or so pages, in the description of the battle of the Yarmūk, a stellar cast of heroic women fills the traditional role of Bedouin women of inciting the men to bravery and, moreover, doing brave deeds themselves far beyond any historical reality. To be sure, they are encouraged at the beginning of the battle by a man, the Muslim leader, who gives them a short pep talk. He starts cheerfully with an out-of-context quotation from the hadith: "Women are defective in intelligence and religion" (I, 133).<sup>24</sup> For obvious reasons, it is left unsaid but is apparently implied that now the women have the opportunity to prove the Prophet wrong, and they do go on to act most intelligently in the true religious spirit.

It all tends to show that the author or prose bard tried to express two somewhat conflicting realities. On the one hand, we have a muted protest against the restricted status of women in his time. The basic theme of the greater freedom of women in early Islam is historically quite true; women then possessed more independence and were able to use it to the best advantage of society. The theme is not unknown also to high literature and seems to have been endorsed as a recommendable model that should, but did not, correspond to reality.<sup>25</sup> It must have pleased the large female segment of the audience, and it probably also appealed to the secret longings of the men for more shared experience among the sexes. On the other hand, everything is very proper according to Islam, brothers and sisters, husbands and wives, foreign maidens being servants or instruments in the cause of Islam. It is also all very chaste, no explicitness of any sort, hardly even in the vocabulary, fully appropriate even for young ears.

The picture is only slightly different in novels whose subject is not the heroic age during which virtue and propriety ruled supreme without question but is closer to the contemporary scene. The seamier sides of urban civilization cannot be entirely overlooked and are occasionally mentioned. Down-to-earth jokes are not unknown. Whatever love interest occurs is as chaste and proper and subdued as could be wished.<sup>26</sup>

As *The Thousand and One Nights* shows, entertaining fiction without pretense to history was not very different in its moral outlook. In a corpus as vast and of

<sup>24</sup> For the hadith cf. A. J. Wensinck and others, *Concordance et indices de la tradition musulmane* (Leiden, 1936-1969), VI, 539, lines 9-11.

<sup>25</sup> Al-Jāhiz argued at length in the *Kitāb al-Qiyān* that in early Islamic times, it had been permissible to converse with women and look at them. Cf. also Aḥmad b. al-Ṭayyib as-Sarakhsī as quoted in *Jawāmi' al-ladhdha*, MS Istanbul Fatih 3729, fol. 65.

<sup>26</sup> H. Wangelin, *Das arabische Volksbuch vom König az-Zahir Baibars* (Stuttgart, 1936), p. 305. A recent analysis of the literature, which pays attention to its relation to reality, is U. Steinbach, *Ḍāt al-Himma* (Wiesbaden, 1972), cf. pp. 102-105, on love stories in the romances.

such composite origin, we should not be surprised to encounter at times dubious anecdotes derived from the more sophisticated literature, as well as occasional portrayals of unromantic reality. Physical love and erotic beauty are explicitly described in prose and in poetic insertions. The descriptions may have been shocking to earlier generations in the modern West, but in general they show more artistic merit than can be found in much comparable modern literature. Men and women are often depicted as being very little restricted in their opportunities of meeting each other and making love. The legalists who were convinced that every societal and individual evil starts with the most innocent contact between the sexes <sup>27</sup> would, of course, have been shocked, just as the poetry quoted would have shocked those who viewed all love poetry as dangerous to morality. We find, however, a similar dichotomy here as in the historical novels. The vulgar anecdotes are usually obvious intrusions; storytellers are unlikely to have ever used them. They are canceled out by a large number of educational discourses and sermons on conventional morality. Sexual misbehavior is almost always presented as the doings of despicable characters,<sup>28</sup> or as practiced by lecherous fools leading to the deserved punishment, or as something to be passed over in silence.<sup>29</sup>

True love has its misfortunes and sad consequences. Happily, it starts out most often with a proper Muslim marriage or leads to one lasting forever. Violence, cruelty, and poverty are plentiful and important reflections of reality in *The Thousand and One Nights*. Their role as factors in society is commonly underplayed, I think, whereas romantic love freely expressed exercises a hold over the imagination much more powerful than reality warranted. This indicates a certain longing to break away from recommended moral norms. Yet, it is more than counterbalanced by the always evident desire to convey satisfaction with the established order. The reality of urban social life is assumed to be morally acceptable and governed largely by healthy Muslim standards.

The poets and writers of fiction can tell us a good deal, but the branch of *adab* literature most commonly understood by the term holds by far the greatest promise of serving as a source for us to get behind official attitudes and gain an insight into what real people thought and how they judged actions. It is well known that this branch of *adab* literature is hard to define. It consists of topically arranged accumulations of aphorisms, prose mini-essays, and snatches of verse, rather than full-blown poems. It deals with a large variety of problems of language and literature and, above all, of ethical and practical behavior. The numerous long works on love belong to it. It also includes the books more specifically dealing with sexual matters, even some of those by physicians. A distinguished scientist

<sup>27</sup> Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziya, *al-Ṭuruq al-ḥukmiya* (Cairo, 1372/1953), p. 281.

<sup>28</sup> For instance, practically the only appearance of acknowledged lesbianism occurs in the story of King 'Umar b. an-Nu'mān and his sons where the ugly witch Dhāt ad-dawāhī is accused of it (390th Night of the Calcutta edition).

<sup>29</sup> Cf., for instance, the missing story of the third eunuch in the 40th night.



and physician of the twelfth century indicates the purpose of his erotic work in these words: "I have decided to write a book serious as well as humorous, literary and entertaining as well as medical, theoretical as well as practical, conversational (?) as well as philosophical."<sup>30</sup> By all odds the most valuable preserved work of the genre is the *Jawāmi' al-ladhdha* by a certain Abū l-Ḥasan 'Alī b. Naṣr al-Kātib, probably of the late tenth century. Its introductory words contain a convincing justification for doing something that in less skilled hands and coarser minds could easily turn out to be objectionable. The argument uses two premises generally accepted as valid in Muslim scientific thought: for one, sex is an animal pleasure that man shares with animals, and, second, man possesses superiority over all animals by virtue of his being endowed with reason. It follows that human sexual activity must be combined with "the best cultural and literary attitudes and the finest verbal expressions."<sup>31</sup> As a consequence, the *Jawāmi' al-ladhdha* and other works of the kind tend to be in the best literary tradition and are valuable sources for societal attitudes.

The literary form of *adab* often requires presenting all sides of controversial subjects. The various views are reported, as it were, impartially, without stating the author's preference except indirectly. The pious Ibn al-Jawzī would entitle his work on love "The Censure of Passion." In spite of the work's definite slant in that direction, it does not slight any aspect of love. The conventional stance of impartial reporting subscribed to by Muslim scholarship is helpful in many ways but often leaves unanswered the question of social reality as seen by an author. Take, for instance, the question of polygamy. Al-Ḥajjāj, the formidable Umayyad governor, expresses the opinion that a man's pleasure is complete only when he has four free women as wives. Right away, a poet takes the hint, sells everything he owns, marries four women for a substantial dowry, is very much disappointed in all of them, and describes his plight in suitable verses as befits a poet.<sup>32</sup> A Bedouin, apparently in more modest circumstances, thinks that a man who does not have two wives has not tasted the sweetness of life. So he marries two wives and regrets it.<sup>33</sup> A historian tells us about the actual case of three murders as the result of a man's having taken a second wife in addition to his cousin to whom he was married: "Three persons are gone as a result of the passion of 'the soul that

<sup>30</sup> *Fa-qad ajma'tu 'alā inshā'i kitābin jiddīyin hazīīn adabīyin ḡibbīyin 'ilmīyin 'amālīyin nidāmīyin (?) ḥikmīyin*, cf. as-Samaw'al b. Yaḥyā al-Maghribī, *Nuzhat al-aḥbāb (al-aḥḡāb) wa-mu'āsharat dhawī al-albāb (fī mu'āsharat al-aḥbāb)*, MS Istanbul Aya Sofya 2129 (written in Dhū l-Qa'da 1113/April 1702), and MS Paris Ar. 3054. The Istanbul MS may have *ḡilmī* as the last word; the correct reading of what I have pointed *nidāmī* remains to be established. Part of the work formed the subject of an Erlangen dissertation by T. Haddad (1976), cf. *Current Work*, above, n. 19.

<sup>31</sup> *Maḥāsin al-adab wa-l-aḡḡafat al-khiḡāb*. I used MS Istanbul Fatih 3729 (written in Rabī' II 582/June-July 1186).

<sup>32</sup> Al-Qāḡī, *Amālī*, *Dhayl* (Cairo, 1373/1953), III, 47 f.

<sup>33</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, II, 34. Cf. as-Subkī, *Ṭabaqāt ash-Shāfi'īya* (Cairo 1383—/1964—), IX, 424.

incites to evil'—may God protect us from the wicked afflictions of Satan."<sup>34</sup> Predictably, we are not told in so many words what the authors, in reporting anecdote or fact, thought of the official view of polygamy. We know that for economic, if no other reasons, monogamy was the prevalent type of marriage in society at large. Thus, we are probably justified in taking these stories to be the closest—and, in fact, the only possible—approach to expressing doubt in the ultimate wisdom of one of the established rules governing marital practice.

Or take a subject that is natural enough but quite unthinkable according to official Muslim standards of behavior, that is, the case of the bride who is several months pregnant when her father gives her away on the wedding day. It does not seem to be a common topic in *adab* literature but has found its small place in it.<sup>35</sup> Two tenth-century poets chose to write a few clever verses about it. In the one case, it is stated that the bride was pregnant by her future husband:

Abū Bakr al-Khuwārizmī on a man whose daughter was given away to her bridegroom while she was several months pregnant by him:

O you who are giving away the girl after she has been deflowered,  
You are seasoning the pot after it has been overturned.

It is just as the proverb says:  
The house was whitewashed after having fallen in ruins.<sup>36</sup>

In the other case, it is seemingly implied that the bride had had relations with another man:

Mazlūma<sup>37</sup> who has just been given in marriage to Ibn 'Umar  
Gave birth to a male child on her wedding night.

I said: Where is this boy from, since no human hand has touched her?  
Her husband said to me: Is it not reported in a well-attested tradition that

'A man's child belongs to the bed,  
And to the bastard the stone'?<sup>38</sup>

I said: Congratulations to you on his birth,  
In spite of those who disagree with the tradition.<sup>39</sup>

<sup>34</sup> *Al-Ḥawādith al-jāmi'a*, wrongly ascribed to Ibn al-Fuwaṣṣī (Baghdād, 1351/1932), p. 452.

<sup>35</sup> Ar-Rāghib al-Iṣfahānī, *Muḥāḍarāt al-udabā'* (Bulāq, 1286-1287/1869-1870), II, 141.

<sup>36</sup> Ath-Tha'libī, *Yatīmat ad-dahr*, IV, 147. On Abū Bakr al-Khuwārizmī, who died around 1000, cf. F. Sezgin, *Geschichte des arabischen Schrifttums*, Vol. II (Leiden, 1975), pp. 635 f.

<sup>37</sup> "Wronged girl" appears to have been used here as a proper name. The first verse is omitted in ar-Rāghib al-Iṣfahānī's quotation (see n. 35).

<sup>38</sup> The interpretation of the second half of the famous hadith is very much debated.

<sup>39</sup> Kushājim, *Dīwān*, ed. Khayrīyah M. Maḥfūz (Baghdād, 1390/1970), p. 274.



The verses are satirical, and in satire, as we have mentioned, every kind of slander was considered permissible. The poets do not give us the impression that they are describing a very unusual occurrence. But how common, we may ask, is the reality behind it? More to the point, do these verses, despite the malicious snicker, reveal a certain tolerance of disapproved behavior, and do they allow us to suspect some serious questioning of the validity of established morality concealed behind jocose banter? The answer, I believe, should be that indeed there is some but not much. It would again seem to be a muted protest, one that would quickly melt away if it were to come out in the open and were forced to confront societal disapproval.

Somewhat surprisingly, the *adab* literature occasionally expressed doubt as to the morality of its own outspokenness. The use of explicit language in literature was summarily proscribed in recent times in the West, which can probably claim this as a unique distinction. It still strikes us as a bit strange even today when we find the great Ibn 'Arabī addressing a legal question to his infant daughter who was not yet able to speak and, lo and behold, he hears her talk and give the right answer to the astonishment of everybody present. It is not so much the miracle that seems strange but that Ibn 'Arabī should have asked the infant girl of all things about some problem of ritual purity resulting from sexual intercourse.<sup>40</sup> I believe that today, however, we would no longer dare to draw totally unwarranted conclusions from the multiplicity of detailed terms for sexual life gathered by the Arab philologists. This is something that G. Levi Della Vida rejected with his usual good sense and quiet logic.<sup>41</sup>

Two of the most eminent of Arabic *littérateurs* of the so-called Golden Age, al-Jāḥiẓ and Ibn Qutayba, found it advisable to apologize for their outspokenness. When specific biological terms are used, al-Jāḥiẓ says, some people make a show of piety. They cringe and recoil in embarrassment. Most of them are men whose modesty, good breeding, talent, and dignity do not go beyond this sort of affectation. Their hypocrisy only reflects on them and shows their meanness. . . . These words were invented, he continues, to be employed by the speakers of the language. If they had been meant to be left unspoken, there would be no point in their having come into being in the first place, and it would be in the interest of the sacred character (? , prudence?) and the preservation of the Arabic language if these words were entirely eliminated from it. In addition, there are enough examples for their use by, or in the presence of, the Prophet and the greatest of the early Muslims to make them generally acceptable. Al-Jāḥiẓ concludes with the proverb: "Each place has [its] verbal statement"—the right words must always be

<sup>40</sup> Ibn 'Arabī, *al-Futūḥāt al-Makkīya* (Cairo and Mecca, 1329/1911), III, 17.

<sup>41</sup> As mentioned by G.-H. Bousquet, *L'éthique sexuelle de l'Islam* (Paris, 1966), pp. 212 f. Not in the first edition of Bousquet's work, published under the title *La morale de l'Islam et son éthique sexuelle* (Paris, 1953).

used in their proper places.<sup>42</sup> Ibn Qutayba also relied on the precedents set by the irreproachable men of the past. He characterizes his own well-known *adab* work as being

like a table on which diners can find dishes of different taste according to their different desires. If you encounter in it stories that use explicit language, do not let modesty or the pretense to modesty make you turn, or look, away. There is nothing sinful in the words designating parts of the body. Sinfulness is attacking other people's honor, using falsehoods and lies, and making slanderous accusations. . . . I do not mean to allow you to use [such words] habitually and customarily in all circumstances for whatever you may wish to say. You should use them when you tell a tale or transmit a story which would lose through the use of circumlocution or be deprived of its pleasant effect through allusiveness. I wish you would make sparse use of them, in keeping with the custom of the pious ancients who followed their instinct and thereby avoided mystification born of hypocrisy and affectation.<sup>43</sup>

Even without the further evidence that we can muster,<sup>44</sup> it is clear that these statements represent a reaction against the invasion of literature by language and topics theretofore largely excluded from it. Two factors were principally responsible for the changed situation. One was the shift of the political center of the Muslim world from the western toward the eastern Near East which shook old Arabic literary conventions. The other was more fundamental. G. E. von Grunebaum has explained it in one of his brilliant essays. It was the shift to a predominantly urban setting which had the result that "ritualized life provided situations in which the unseemly would become seemly."<sup>45</sup> It was in this setting

<sup>42</sup> Al-Jāhiz discussed the subject in two works with slight variations, cf. *Kitāb Muḍākharrat al-jawārī wa-l-ghilmān*, in *Rasā'il al-Jāhiz*, ed. 'Abd as-Salām M. Hārūn (Cairo, 1384/1964-1965), II, 92-94, and *Kitāb al-Hayawān* (Cairo, 1323-1325/1905-1907), III, 12; ed. Hārūn (Cairo, 1366/1946), III, 40-43. See C. Pellat, *Arabische Geisteswelt* (Zürich and Stuttgart, 1967), pp. 434 f., Eng. trans., *The Life and Works of Jāhiz* (London, Berkeley, and Los Angeles, 1969), p. 270; C. E. Bosworth, *The Medieval Islamic Underworld* (Leiden, 1976), I, 33. For an application of the much used proverb to literary theory, cf. G. Schoeler, *Einige Grundprobleme der autochthonen und der aristotelischen arabischen Literaturtheorie*, Abh. f. d. Kunde des Morgenlandes, XLI, 4 (Wiesbaden, 1975), p. 9.

<sup>43</sup> Ibn Qutayba, *Uyūn al-akhbār* (Cairo, 1343-1349/1924-1930; repr. 1963-1964), I, y. See R. Levy, *The Social Structure of Islam* (Cambridge, 1957), p. 235.

<sup>44</sup> For instance, in connection with the idea popularized by al-Jāhiz that homosexuality spread in the Muslim world owing to the army life of the Khurāsānians who brought the 'Abbāsids into power, Ḥamza al-Iṣfahānī commented that it was Abū Nuwās who introduced pederastic poetry, although, Ḥamza admits, he may not have been the first to do so, and he thereby reflected changed political and social conditions. See E. Mittwoch, "Die literarische Tätigkeit Ḥamza al-Iṣfahānīs," *Mitteilungen des Seminars für Orientalische Sprachen*, Westas. Studien, XII (1909), p. 138.

<sup>45</sup> G. E. von Grunebaum, "Aspects of Arabic Urban Literature," *Al-Andalus*, XX (1955), 259-281.



that writers of the stature of an al-Jāḥiẓ and an Ibn Qutayba felt compelled to caution against excesses in the new literary style they themselves used, and they did it in an eminently sane spirit.

Obviously, literature tends to overlook the ordinary. We do not hear much of middle class reaction. For scholars, the use of vulgar language was naturally unbecoming, something beyond the pale of scholarly dignity.<sup>46</sup> Decorum was demanded in holy places. Abū Nuwās was reproved for allegedly reciting indecent verses of his in Mecca during the pilgrimage, "and this in such a place!"<sup>47</sup> The upper classes were widely depicted as enjoying literary licentiousness. Thus, exceptions carry special weight. Among men of high rank, not everybody was as sensitive as Sayf ad-Dawla. He objected to the last line of a poem which read:

Thus your generosity has provided us  
With food and drink and sex and clothing.

"On the whole a wonderful poem," Sayf ad-Dawla exclaimed, "except for the word 'sex'. This is not a word to be used when one speaks to kings." The reporter's comment: "This shows his remarkable sensitivity as a literary critic (*wa-hādhā min 'ajlbi naqdihi*)."<sup>48</sup>

Even physicians were reluctant to speak about some topics. The ninth-century Christian physician Qusṭā b. Lūqā claimed that "Galen had not deigned to discuss intercourse."<sup>49</sup> Not many later authors went that far, but at times they found it necessary to justify and apologize for their discussion of subjects which they were not sure were to be considered medical problems or moral problems to be left to society to handle.<sup>50</sup>

<sup>46</sup> Cf. the anecdote told about Malik an-Nuḥāḥ al-Ḥasan b. Abī l-Ḥasan Ṣāfi, as reported by Yāqūt, *Irshād*, ed. D. S. Margoliouth (Leiden and London, 1907-1927), III, 77; ed. A. F. Rifa'i (Cairo, n.d. [1355-1357/1936-1938]), VIII, 128 f.

<sup>47</sup> Wakī', *Akhbār al-quḍāh*, ed. 'Abd al-'Azīz M. al-Marāghī (Cairo, 1366-1369/1947-1950), III, 278 f.

<sup>48</sup> Ath-Tha'ālibī, *Yasīmat ad-duhr*, I, 14. I doubt that Sayf ad-Dawla merely objected to the specific form used (*mankūh*). For ath-Tha'ālibī's hesitation to quote the poet Ibn al-Ḥajjāj, cf. *ibid.*, II, 271, and J. C. Bürgel, in *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft*, CXXXI (1971), 162.

<sup>49</sup> Qusṭā b. Lūqā, *Fi ('ilal) ikhtilāf an-nās fi siyarihim wa-akhlāqihim wa-shuhawātihim wa-khtiyārātihim*, ed., trans. P. Sbath, "Le Livre des caractères de Qosṭā ibn Loūqā," *Bulletin de l'Institut d'Égypte*, XXIII (1940-1941), 134.

<sup>50</sup> For the medical attitude, which would need special consideration in connection with our subject, cf. the rather dated and strange passage in C. Elgood, *A Medical History of Persia and the Eastern Caliphate* (Cambridge, 1951), pp. 294-298: "The subject of sex, the satisfaction of the sexual appetite, birth control and all that these subjects imply, was treated with considerably more freedom of expression than is usual even to-day. Sex entered so much into the daily life of the oriental that in this sense all the physicians of those days were gynaecologists. Avicenna seems to have felt that the subject was perhaps beneath the dignity

The *adab* literature makes it quite explicit that friendship and emotional love were to be kept separate from marital relationships and other expressions of sexuality. Ar-Rāghib al-Isfahānī devotes separate chapters of his large anthology to those four subjects. What is puzzling is that he should have seen fit to separate them in the middle by a chapter on courage. Motivation unacknowledged is always dangerous to speculate about. Perhaps ar-Rāghib meant to suggest that courage is needed to separate the ideal in human relationships from commonplace practice. He thereby confirmed the existence of the conflict between fiction and reality and suggested a possible approach to handling it.

In these and many other ways, the literary genres considered here reveal something about the Muslim attitude toward the eternal problem of how inborn human longings can be brought to terms with societal demands. The numerous bits and pieces of information await eventual integration. Summary conclusions and valid generalizations may, however, be beyond our reach. They can probably never be achieved where life in its totality is involved. Even to attempt them seems frivolous. In the case of medieval Islam, whatever may be approximately correct for one region or period, or one type of environment, may be inapplicable to another. Also, as has been stated at the beginning, we do not have enough detailed and unambiguous coverage. The social information we can gather from the sources makes it clear that nothing human was strange to medieval Muslim society. The particular mixture of fiction and reality they present presupposes a freedom much tempered by restraint, even prudery. In a sense, imaginative literature developed its own standard view of what the ideal society should be like, just as religion, law, and philosophy had done. Different as that standard was, it was apparently considered fully capable of existing side by side with that of official Islam. It was certainly not felt that it needed to come into conflict with it.

For official Islam, it was much less of a transgression to neglect a religious obligation than come out openly against its theoretical necessity.<sup>51</sup> Also, al-Ghazzālī reports an authentic statement of Bilāl b. Sa'd, a man of the second generation, that "misbehavior kept concealed harms only the person who misbehaves, but if it is brought out into the open and not rectified, it harms people in

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of a physician, for having discussed the matter in the usual manner, he adds: 'It is by no means disgraceful for a physician to speak of the enlargement of the male organ and of the narrowing of the female who receives it and of her pleasure. Nay rather it is eminently proper, for it is by these means that the act of birth follows.'" The passage of Ibn Sīnā is to be found in the *Qānūn* (Rome, 1593), p. 563. His reluctance, of course, refers only to the particular topic which he knew was always dealt with in the erotic literature and which was properly speaking not the concern of the physician. Ar-Rāzī was apologetic about discussing *ubna*, (see *Bulletin of the History of Medicine*, LII (1978), 45-60), and even the author of the *Jawāmi' al-ladhdha*, fol. 42a (cf. also fol. 71b) recoiled from the subject for which he used the synonym *bighā'*: "We have kept our book free from mentioning *bighā'* because of its ugliness, shamefulness, and the great despicableness of the person afflicted by it."

<sup>51</sup> Cf. Bousquet (above, n. 41) (Paris, 1953), p. 18; (Paris, 1966), pp. 10 f.



general.”<sup>52</sup> Al-Ghazzālī quoted this remark with reference to some minor lapse in the correct performance of prayer; any real sin, however small, would not have been viewed by him as a minor matter.<sup>53</sup> Yet the social philosophy behind Bilāl’s statement appears to have been widely applied to matters of moral behavior. It also explains why it rarely if ever occurred to anyone to question openly the apparent discrepancy between ideal and reality. It was possible, for better or worse, to abide by the established rules and at the same time acknowledge quietly that reality could never be in complete harmony with them and that fictional longings had their own kind of legitimacy. For sexual morality, this probably resulted in as good an equilibrium as could be achieved in a large and varied society.

<sup>52</sup> Al-Ghazzālī, *Iḥyāʾ* (Cairo, 1352/1933), I, 172, at the end of the sixth chapter of the book on *asrār aṣ-ṣalāh*. Bilāl b. Saʿd was considered the Syrian counterpart of the ʿIrāqī al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī. He therefore found the most attention in the Syrian biographical tradition, such as the *Taʾrīkh Dimashq* of Ibn ʿAsākir, ed. M. A. Dahmān (Damascus, n.d.), X, 354-377; cf. also adh-Dhahabī, *Taʾrīkh al-Islām*, Vol. IV (Cairo, 1369/1949), pp. 234-236. A lengthy biography is also devoted to him in Abū Nuʾaym, *Ḥilyat al-awliyāʾ* (reprint Beirut, 1387/1967), V, 221-234.

The statement is as authentic as anything known from these early times can be. It was transmitted by al-Awzāʾī to ʿAbdallāh b. al-Mubārak and appears in the latter’s *Kitāb az-Zuhd wa-r-raqdʾiq*, ed. Ḥabīb ar-Raḥmān al-Aʿzamī (Nasik, India, n.d. [ca. 1971]), pp. 475 f. Abū Nuʾaym, *Ḥilyat al-awliyāʾ*, V, 222, reports it from Ibn al-Mubārak. It is quoted in several slightly different versions in *Taʾrīkh Dimashq*, X, 362 f. The word translated here “misbehavior” is either *khafīʾa* or *maʿṣiya*. The only variant that deserves notice is between *ukhfiyat-uʿlinat* (al-Ghazzālī: *ukhfiyat-uḥhirat*) and *khafiyat-ṣaharat*. The latter does not have the element of active effort present in the former. Since Bilāl is depicted as particularly averse to hypocrisy, the reading *ukhfiyat-uʿlinat* may be more consonant with his way of thinking, and it is indeed the reading found in Ibn al-Mubārak.

<sup>53</sup> As a matter of fact, Bilāl b. Saʿd is credited with the remark: “Don’t look at the smallness of a sin. Rather behold the One Whom you have sinned against.” See Ibn al-Mubārak, *Zuhd*, p. 24; Abū Nuʾaym, *Ḥilyat al-awliyāʾ*, V, 223; Ibn ʿAsākir, *Taʾrīkh Dimashq*, X, 373.

# **SEX AND SOCIETY IN ISLAMIC POPULAR LITERATURE**

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Over the last one hundred years a profound change has come about in the attitude of Western civilization toward sex. Within the space of three generations we in the West have greatly increased our knowledge of the psychological and sociological aspects of sex. This new knowledge is no longer confined to doctors and other specialists but has, by and large, become common property. It is written about by journalists, taught in the schools, served up as stock themes in fiction, and is vulgarized in many other ways. We are said to be in the midst of a sexual revolution, which means simply that many people, equipped with their new knowledge, whether fully assimilated or not, are choosing to live according to their own lights in matters of sex, untrammelled by religious conventions or restrictions of the law.

Under such conditions it is quite proper for those of us who specialize in Islamics and Arabic literature to study the role of sex in Muslim society, for no society can be fully understood if its sexual morality is ignored. Even worse than ignoring the sexual morality of a society under study is to misrepresent it and judge it on the basis of one's own moral convictions. Scholarly detachment and objectivity are lost; the results are misleading if not altogether false, and the subject becomes even more difficult for later scholars to handle than it should be. One quotation is sufficient to illustrate this point:

From the moment when woman was recognized the peer of man, when monogamy became a law and was consolidated by legal, religious and moral conditions, the Christian nations obtained a mental and material superiority over the polygamic races, and especially over Islam. . . .

Above all things Islamism excludes woman from public life and enterprise, and stifles her intellectual and moral advancement. The Mohammedan woman is simply a means for sensual gratification and the propagation of the species; whilst in the sunny balm of Christian doctrine, blossom forth her divine virtues and her qualities of housewife, companion and mother. What a contrast!



Compare the two religions and their standard of future happiness. The Christian expects a heaven of spiritual bliss absolutely free from carnal pleasure; the Mohammedan an eternal harem, a paradise among lovely houris.

The author of this statement was, surprisingly enough, a man whom many would consider to be one of the ancestors of our sexual revolution. The quotation is from Krafft-Ebing's *Psychopathia Sexualis*.<sup>1</sup>

Muslim sexual morality has fared better at the hands of those involved in Islamic and Arabic studies as a scholarly discipline. But even specialists cannot always prevent their own views of what morality should be from obtruding themselves. In the introduction to his brief but excellent work, *La morale de l'Islam et son éthique sexuelle*, which treats the subject mostly from the point of view of the law, G.-H. Bousquet notes that his interest in the subject arose from the fact that he had been raised in a Calvinist milieu, from which he had later detached himself.<sup>2</sup> He further states, quite fairly and openly, that he finds many things to blame in Muslim ethics, in particular, divorce.<sup>3</sup> In the course of the work it becomes clear, mostly in the manner of expression, that he does not approve of child marriage, polygamy, and the status of women in general.<sup>4</sup> It is not out of place to note that if Bousquet had retained his Calvinism, he would still have criticized the very same features of Muslim morality, though from a religious basis, rather than from the presumably sociological one on which he now stands. This is not to be taken as a serious criticism of Bousquet's book, since the author states his prejudices, so that the reader can judge for himself whether he treats the subject fairly or not.

I believe, however, that in dealing with so delicate and sensitive a subject as sex we must make a special effort not to arouse a defensive reaction in those whose most private and personal feelings and beliefs are under scrutiny. We have—I am sure all will agree—in the work of the current medalist, Franz Rosenthal, and in that of Giorgio Levi Della Vida, in whose memory this lecture series was established, models of meticulous and, above all, dispassionate scholarship which we would all do well to follow.

I shall follow Bousquet's excellent example and state my own prejudices. I was raised a secularist in the middle of the American Bible belt. Because of my early associations, I am imbued with, I believe, a respect for religious values and traditions and sympathy for religious feelings; above all, I realize that for many people religion really does work—that is, it provides them with an adequate moral code to live by and it helps them overcome the hardships of life and the fear of death. Much of what I have read in the Muslim hadith literature on sex reminds

<sup>1</sup> R. von Krafft-Ebing, *Psychopathia Sexualis* (Brooklyn, N.Y., 1930), p. 5.

<sup>2</sup> G.-H. Bousquet, *La morale de l'Islam et son éthique sexuelle* (Paris, 1953), p. 8 (hereafter cited as Bousquet).

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 10.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., chap. vii, passim.

me of what I once heard from the pulpit—in spirit, at least, if not in the letter. Therefore I feel a certain empathy with those men who wrote these anecdotes and with those who read and believed them, and made them their rule of life. Nevertheless, I admit freely that I approach the whole question of sex in Islam from a secularist point of view.

In what follows I try as much as possible to treat sex as such, the physical act itself, without reference either to law or love. My reasons are, first, because other participants in this conference are better qualified to speak on law and love than I, but also because I believe that there is something to be gained from the subject handled in this manner. Sexual morality and the law, while mutually dependent to a great degree, do not always go hand in hand; this is certainly true of Islam as we shall see. "Love" is a very general term, which runs through a whole spectrum of meanings, from the cliché—which, of course, arose in a Christian society—that "sex is all right provided you really love each other," to the view that true love is totally devoid of sexual content. Ultimately, however, it is the sexual act itself which society either forbids or tolerates, punishes or encourages. Muslim society does not accomplish this end by means of the law, which is often ambiguous or unenforceable, nor by doctrines of love, to which many Muslim moralists were opposed. Muslim sexual morality is sustained by a mass of didactic literature which was produced in the early centuries of Islam, and took the form of hadith which purport to go back to the Prophet, and *akhbār* (plural of *khbar*), which come down from the pious Muslims of succeeding generations. These hadith and *akhbār*, which together can be called "anecdotes" for the sake of brevity, were eagerly invented, collected, and transmitted by the early Muslims, and later on the process developed into an academic discipline. In my title I have referred to this genre, with some risk of ambiguity, as Islamic "popular" literature, because it was, in fact, the most popular literary activity exercised by Muslims for a period of about two centuries. Literally thousands of people were engaged in it; when Bukhārī, the great traditionist of the third/ninth century, transmitted hadith out of doors, he was attended by audiences numbered in the thousands.<sup>5</sup> In later times we know from the reading certificates on extant manuscripts that reading sessions were often attended by scores of people, including women, slaves, and even small children.<sup>6</sup> People literally flocked to hear hadith and *akhbār*, and one cannot doubt that this was the most important means by which Muslim society instructed its members in the principles of Muslim morality.

These anecdotes were put into circulation by a group referred to commonly as *ahl al-ḥadīth* or *aṣḥāb al-ḥadīth*. The history of the movement is known in its broad outlines, but the details are obscure because it is usually quite impossible to date any given anecdote. It began in Medina sometime during the first century,

<sup>5</sup> Al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī, *Ta'rikh Baghdād* (Cairo, 1931) II, 15.

<sup>6</sup> See Ṣalāḥ ad-Dīn al-Munajjid, "Ijāzāt as-samā' fī al-makhṭū'āt al-qadīma," *Revue de l'Institut des Manuscrits Arabe* (Cairo), I, 2 (1955), 232-251.



and was at first opposed by the *fuqahā'* (lawyers). It gathered strength slowly, and then in the second/eighth century flowered tremendously. The ahl al-hadith put forward the claim that only hadith from the Prophet should be authoritative in matters of law, and to make good this claim produced hadith with chains of transmitters, by which they were traced back to the Prophet. Sometime around the middle of the second century a development took place which surely was one of the most important in the whole history of Arabic literature, indeed, in the evolution and propagation of Islam itself. This was the development of the *muṣannaḥ*-collection of hadith, in which the anecdotes were arranged by subject heading, many of which were the ones commonly dealt with by the *fuqahā'*. In the great *muṣannaḥ*-collections of the third/ninth century one can find what one is looking for, at least as far as the subject is concerned, without having to read through an enormous mass of material, and without the need to devote years of one's life to the study and memorization of hadith. Even the lawyers capitulated, and under the leadership of ash-Shāfi'ī, the principle of the authority of the Prophetic hadith was accepted by the new schools of law which were then in the process of formation.

It is important to note that the ahl al-hadith developed no body of law themselves. As J. Schacht points out, the traditionists were mainly concerned with subordinating the legal subject matter to religious and moral principles expressed in traditions from the Prophet.<sup>7</sup> I would add to this that they also transmitted many akhbār for the same purpose, although the victory of hadith in matters of law eventually contributed to the decline of interest, at least among the specialists, in the transmission of akhbār. Only the Sufis continued to produce in each new generation a new supply of anecdotal material.

It was this movement, in both its religious and its literary aspects, which ultimately, I am convinced, gave to Islam its religiosity and its moral tone, the familiar face that it still presents to the world today.

In this study, for the early anecdotal material I have, for the most part, drawn on two of the major collections of hadith that were compiled in the third century, the *Ṣaḥīḥ* of Bukhārī and the *Jāmi'* of Tirmidhī. I have also used the *Dhamm al-malāhī* (Blame of Musical Instruments) by Ibn Abī d-Dunyā (d. 281/894), which is important because of the large number of akhbār that it contains.<sup>8</sup>

The next major development in the utilization of hadith and akhbār is to be found in the rise of another popular genre of literature which we might term

<sup>7</sup> Joseph Schacht, *An Introduction to Islamic Law* (Oxford, 1964), p. 35.

<sup>8</sup> I have referred to this work only by MS Laleli 3664; the edition and translation published by James Robson in his *Tracts on Listening to Music*, Oriental Translation Fund, n.s. Vol. XXIV (London, 1938), were based on MS Berlin 5504 (Landberg 1019), which is an abridgment comprising only about a quarter of the whole work. There are numerous errors in the text which are reflected in the translation.

"religious treatise" or "essay." In Arabic there is no specific term for such works which are sometimes called *risāla* but most often merely *kitāb*. These treatises draw heavily on Koran and anecdotes, but the author instead of remaining a mere compiler and transmitter now begins to give free rein to his imagination, explaining and interpreting the material according to his own lights, so as to convey to the reader the message—that is, the moral and religious values—that he feels the material contains. To the Sufis goes the credit for taking the scattered and often dry and repetitious anecdotes and shaping them into a viable sexual ethic, expressed in simple language for the nonspecialist with a minimum of technical terms. The two works of this sort that I have used are the *Qūt al-qulūb* of Abū Ṭālib al-Makkī and the *lhyā' 'ulūm ad-din* by al-Ghazzālī, both of which are still quite popular among Muslims today. In the former, the chapter on marriage is in many ways a remarkable piece of work, a veritable marriage manual for Muslims. Ghazzālī is more formal, with his well-known penchant for classifying and subclassifying, and he is much more thorough in his treatment of sin than Abū Ṭālib. Together the two works present what is probably the best compendium of Muslim sexual ethics to be found.

The more conservative ahl al-hadith at first opposed this new tendency, but they could not hold out for long. Their efforts along the same lines culminated in the work of Ibn al-Jauzī, a conservative Hanbalite and a brilliant hadith scholar. His work that concerns us here, *Dhamm al-hawā* (Blame of Love), is a far cry from the conventional anthology of hadith. In his eagerness to prove that love is blameworthy, Ibn al-Jauzī quotes all the pertinent passages from the Koran and hadith, but he devotes most of the work to giving what must have been to him horrendous examples of the ill effects of love, and, in so doing, he transforms his book into one of the most extensive collections of love stories that we have in Arabic literature. He relates all the famous stories of the star-crossed lovers of the past, Jamīl and Buthaina, Kuthaiyir and 'Azza, and many others, who died or were killed for love, as well as many anecdotes stressing continence, repentance, resistance to seduction, and so forth, all of it accompanied by many citations of poetry. *Dhamm al-hawā* is a charming book, though not quite convincing.

This, then, is the popular literature in which we can find the attitudes toward sex that came to prevail in Muslim society during the Middle Ages. There are two aspects of this literature running through it from the earliest period to the latest—and, in the long run, more important than the details themselves—which we should deal with here. First is the fact that the view of sex presented in the hadith and akhbār is a rather naïve and simplistic, even innocent, view, devoid of complications, free of doubts, and quite unaware of some of the darker aspects of human sexuality. We should not, of course, expect people in the Middle Ages to be aware of such refinements of sex as masochism and sadism, which we in the West learned about only in the nineteenth century. Nevertheless, the ahl al-hadith, if they had looked about them more closely, or had learned from other



literature, might have acquired a deeper awareness of human sexuality, from which their system of morality could only have benefited. I cite only one example, not from the type of literature with which we are primarily concerned. It comes from a risāla by the poet Ibn al-Habbāra (d. 504/1100),<sup>9</sup> cited by Ṣafadī in his commentary on Ṭughrā'ī's *Lāmiyyat al-'Ajam*.

Among them [the sodomites] are those who desire intercourse with a vizier though he may be an old man, or have an emir though he may be middle-aged. He may desire the wife of a ra'īs even though she is old and decrepit. One says, so-and-so is lovable because of his modesty, another is to be buggered (*yunāku*) because of his kindness, and still another is deemed good [for sex] because of his rank (*bi-riyāsatihi*) and the nobility of his house.<sup>10</sup>

Ibn al-Habbāra then relates an incident, which he himself witnessed, that occurred one night in the Dār al-Wizāra in Isfahan at a party attended by men of rank and learning. Quiet had descended on the group when suddenly there was a cry for help. The guests looked up and saw with astonishment that the *adīb* Abū Ja'far al-Qaṣṣās was sexually assaulting the poet Abū al-Ḥasan b. Ja'far al-Bandanījī, who was old and blind. When he had finished, Abū Ja'far explained: "I always wanted to bugger Abū l-'Alā' al-Ma'arrī because of his lack of faith (*kufr*) and his atheism, but I never had the opportunity, so when I saw you, a learned and blind old man, I buggered you on account of him."<sup>11</sup> Krafft-Ebing might well have included this case history in his collection.

Stories like this tell us clearly that the Muslims in the Middle Ages were well aware that there was much more to sex than the simple act of coition. However we find nothing of this sort in our hadith and akhbār literature. Not even Ibn al-Jauzī, who fills his book on the blame of love with love stories, could cite such an anecdote, for it has no moral. There is no indication that the aggressor ever came to a bad end.

This naïveté can in some measure be traced back beyond the ahl al-hadith to the Koran itself. In a passage in which the Muslims are urged to find mates for widows, and their pious menservants and maidservants, we read: "If they are poor, God will enrich [or: satisfy] them from his grace . . . let those who cannot find [he means] to marry remain continent till God enriches them [or: satisfies them] from his grace."<sup>12</sup> It did not escape the notice of later commentators that God often does not provide wealth, and Abū Ṭālib al-Makkī notes that this enrichment or satisfaction can take different forms. God may make them content

<sup>9</sup> Carl Brockelmann, *Geschichte der arabischen Literatur* (Leiden, 1937-1949), I, 293; Suppl., I, 35.

<sup>10</sup> Khalīl b. Aibak aṣ-Ṣafadī, *al-Ghaith al-musalljam fī sharḥ Lāmiyyat al-'Ajam* (Alexandria, 1290), II, 288.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Sura 24:32-33.

to do without, that is, endow them with contentment and asceticism (*qanā'ah*, *zuhd*); he may make their souls content to forego property and profit (*a'rāḍ*), since real wealth is wealth of soul. He may enrich them with certainty (*yaqīn*), since a tradition states that "certainty is sufficient wealth." Or finally, he may enrich them with modesty and chastity.<sup>13</sup>

The second general characteristic is a strong sense of pudency, equaling anything we can find among the Victorians, which pervades the whole of the hadith and akhbār literature on sex. This appears in the reluctance of transmitters to discuss anyone's sexual activity in personal terms, and in the chastity of the language employed. Only a few instances occur in which the sexual practices of a particular individual are mentioned, and there is never anything that could be called obscene. Furthermore, the literature is uniformly serious, without a trace of humor. The few anecdotes that may strike us as funny were clearly never intended to be so.

Jāḥiẓ, who was no friend of the ahl al-hadith, considers this characteristic as no more than an affectation. He says, "Some of those who practice piety (*nask*) and austerity recoil in disgust when words such as *ḥir*, *air*, and *naik* are used. Most such people have no knowledge, nobility, magnanimity, and dignity, except insofar as they have this affectation." He goes on to say that such people ought to be aware of the fact that pious men of the past used such words, and gives a number of examples.<sup>14</sup>

The ahl al-hadith, if they had deigned to answer Jāḥiẓ, would have said simply that they were right and they had traditions to prove it. In fact, this characteristic pudency was already established in the hadith and akhbār long before Jāḥiẓ took issue with it. We are told that "the Prophet was more modest than a virgin in her private quarters; if he found something to be distasteful, we could see it in his face."<sup>15</sup> He is said to have never behaved indecently either in action or in speech (*fāḥish*, *mutafahḥish*),<sup>16</sup> and lack of modesty is denounced as disbelief.<sup>17</sup> 'Alī's modesty is also described, and in one case is contrasted with the coarseness of a pagan who tried to take advantage of it. At the Battle of the Trench 'Alī fought in single combat against 'Amr b. 'Abd Wudd, who exposed his genitals hoping that 'Alī's modesty would cause him to turn aside. In such a crisis 'Alī overcame his essential modesty and slew his adversary, but he was ashamed to take as booty 'Amr's coat of mail because of his indecent behavior.<sup>18</sup>

This pudency may stem ultimately from an understandable reluctance to probe too deeply into the personal life of the Prophet. The ahl al-hadith were in a rather

<sup>13</sup> Abū Ṭālib al-Makkī, *Qūt al-qulūb fī mu'āmalat al-maḥbūb* (2 vols.; Cairo, 1381/1961), II, 527 (hereafter cited as *Qūt al-qulūb*).

<sup>14</sup> 'Amr b. Baḥr al-Jāḥiẓ, *Mufaḥḥarat al-jawārī wal-ghilmān* (Cairo, 1348/1965), p. 92.

<sup>15</sup> Ibn Abī d-Dunyā, *Makārim al-akhlāq* (Wiesbaden, 1973), no. 81.

<sup>16</sup> Abū Dā'ūd al-Ṭayālīsī, *Musnad* (Hyderabad, 1321/1903-4), no. 2246.

<sup>17</sup> Ibn Abī d-Dunyā, *Makārim al-akhlāq*, no. 84.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, no. 196.



delicate position. The core of their teaching was the sunna of the Prophet, yet they could hardly assume, or persuade anyone to believe, that the Prophet would deliberately reveal the most private details of his personal life for the sake of establishing a sunna of sexual behavior. The Prophet's uxoriousness is used in the argument against celibacy, as we shall see below, and his handling of his numerous wives is given as an example of the fair treatment due each of several wives, but there is scarcely any mention of his sexual activity. I have found only one such hadith, which relates that the Prophet saw a woman who aroused his desire. He immediately went to his wife Zainab and satisfied his need on her. He said, "When a woman approaches, she does so in the form of a *shaiṭān*; if one of you sees a woman and likes her, let him go to his wife, for she has the same thing as the other."<sup>19</sup>

The result of this is that almost all the hadith, and following this model, the akhbār as well, are exhortations, statements encouraging one line of conduct and forbidding another, which praise or blame specific sexual acts.

Some aspects of sexual behavior had already been dealt with in the Koran, and, to judge from the sheer quantity of the material in the Koran, it seems that the Prophet intended to produce what he felt to be a complete system of sexual morality for Muslims. Most of the truly important elements in the Muslim sexual ethic are mentioned in the Koran, and they are what receive the greatest elaboration in the hadith and akhbār. Things not mentioned in the Koran do not receive extensive treatment.

The Koranic legislation on sex and marriage is well known. Men are urged to marry and to find spouses for their slaves; the prohibited degrees of consanguinity in marriage are laid down; divorce is discussed, concubinage is allowed. Adultery is forbidden, and the story of Lot is told several times, in terms that leave no doubt that sodomy is forbidden.

Broadly speaking, sexual activity in Muslim society is of two sorts: legal intercourse between a man and a woman (*nikāḥ*), which for the woman means intercourse with her husband only, for the man with his wives and his slave girls; and illegal intercourse, which includes sodomy, between members of the same sex, and *zinā* between male and female, often but not quite accurately translated "adultery." In addition to these, there are several other sexual activities, or other practices associated with sex, that we encounter in hadith and akhbār. These are the questions of celibacy, self-castration, masturbation, coitus interruptus, bestiality, anal intercourse, and transvestitism (*takhannuth*).

In Islam the question of whether one should marry or not is resolved mostly in favor of marriage, although the proponents of celibacy have their say as well. Several traditions are cited in support of marriage and against celibacy. The first

<sup>19</sup> Muḥammad b. 'Abd ar-Raḥmān al-Mubārakfūrī, *Tuḥfat al-Aḥwadhī bi-sharḥ Jāmi' at-Tirmidhī* (10 vols.; Medina, 1384-1387/1964-1968), 10.9 (IV, 322) (hereafter cited as Tirmidhī).

hadith in Bukhārī's *Kitāb an-Nikāḥ* (no. 67) tells the story of three men who come inquiring about the Prophet's religious devotions. When told about them, they are somewhat contemptuous and say boastfully, the first, that he always prays the night through, the second, that he constantly fasts without break, and the third, that he abstains from women. The Prophet says, "I most of all of you am fearful of God and pious, yet I fast and break my fast, I pray and go to bed, and I marry women. Whoever does not like my sunna is not one of mine."<sup>20</sup> In another hadith he addresses the youth: "O young men, those of you financially able to marry should do so, for it is the best thing for assuring modesty and preserving the pudenda [from sin]. He who cannot, must fast, for in fasting he will be able to suppress his sexual desires."<sup>21</sup>

Ibn 'Abbās discovers that Ibn Jubair is not married, and says, "Get married, for the best of this community is the one who has the most women."<sup>22</sup> Sufyān b. 'Uyaina said that frequent marrying is not a worldly practice since 'Alī was the most ascetic of the companions of the Prophet, yet he died leaving four wives and seventeen concubines. Legal sex (*nikāḥ*) is an established sunna (*sunna māḍiya*) and a character trait of prophets.<sup>23</sup>

Some of the later ascetics and Sufis are quite frank about why they married. 'Abdān, a friend of Ibn al-Mubārak, when blamed for his frequent marriages, said he married often to present thoughts of sex from intruding on his devotions.<sup>24</sup> Junaid said, "I need sex the way I need food."<sup>25</sup>

Abū Ṭālib relates of Ibn 'Umar that he used to fast much and when he broke his fast would have intercourse before eating. Often he would have intercourse before the sunset prayer, then he would perform his ablutions (*ghusl*) and go pray. It is said that he had intercourse with four of his slave girls in Ramadan before the evening prayer on the last night.<sup>26</sup>

A more specific prohibition of celibacy is the following hadith related by Sa'd b. Abī Waqqās, who said, "the Prophet refused to let 'Uthmān b. Maẓ'ūn practice sexual abstinence (*tabattul*). If he had allowed him, we could have castrated ourselves."<sup>27</sup> The commentators have some difficulty in deciding whether the word *ikhtāṣainā* is used here literally, or figuratively in the sense of to suppress one's sexual desire, but since it is a hypothetical after the fact, it was probably meant to be taken literally. In the following there can scarcely be any doubt.

<sup>20</sup> Muḥammad b. Ismā'il al-Bukhārī, *al-Jāmi' aṣ-Ṣaḥīḥ*, ed. Ludolf Krehl (4 vols.; Leiden, 1862-1908), 67.1 (III, 410-411) (hereafter cited as Bukhārī).

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 67.3 (III, 411-412).

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 67.4 (III, 412).

<sup>23</sup> *Qūt al-qulūb*, II, 495.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.; Abū Ḥāmid Muḥammad b. Muḥammad al-Ghazzālī, *Ihyā' 'ulūm ad-dīn* (4 vols.; Cairo, 1352/1933), II, 26 (hereafter cited as Ghazzālī).

<sup>26</sup> *Qūt al-qulūb*, II, 495.

<sup>27</sup> Bukhārī, 67.8 (III, 413).



'Abdallāh b. 'Umar relates that they once were on a raid and had nothing (in the way of sexual gratification). They asked, "Why don't we castrate ourselves?" But the Prophet forbade that.<sup>28</sup> Still another tradition says that the castration of Islam is fasting and praying by night.<sup>29</sup>

The insistence on this point indicates that in the early period of Islam there was a strong movement in favor of celibacy. The unwillingness of the majority, however, and the clear example of the Prophet himself established marriage and legal sexual intercourse in general as sunna.

Celibacy, however, crops up again a couple of centuries later among the Sufis in a most interesting way. Not every Sufi had the same physical needs as Junaid. Ibrāhīm b. Adham said, "Whoever gets accustomed to the thighs of women will not find success."<sup>30</sup> Approval of celibacy is confirmed by a hadith qudsī, in which God says, "O young man, you who abandon your sexual desires for my sake, who spend your youth on me; you are to me as one of my angels."<sup>31</sup>

Some Sufis considered that the necessity of caring for a family would force them into illegal acts. Bishr al-Hāfi says, "If I had a family I fear I would be an executioner on the bridge. Being single gives greater ease to the heart and less of care because of the lightness of one's burden, less acquisitiveness, and freedom from struggling; also because one of the rules of the divine law no longer applies to one. The early Muslims used to work to free themselves from this rule because of their inability to live up to it, and they regarded this as booty won."<sup>32</sup>

Two curious hadith—the only ones that can be fairly closely dated—are used to justify celibacy. "After the year 200 celibacy will be allowed in my community; it is better that one of you should rear a pup than that he should rear a son." The second runs: "The best of men after the year 200 will be the one whose back is light, who has no wife and children."<sup>33</sup> These hadith must have been invented after the year 200; they reflect a typical Sufi concern, that of being distracted from the worship of God by worldly concerns, into which category family cares and getting a livelihood are now placed.

The most extensive, and the best organized, Sufi statement on the question of celibacy versus marriage is found, as one might expect, in the *Ihyā'* of Ghazzālī. He quotes all the pertinent passages from Koran and hadith on both sides of the question, and classifies the advantages and disadvantages of marriage as follows. There are five advantages: (1) the getting of children, which is the basis (*aṣl*) for which reason marriage was established; its purpose is to preserve posterity, so that the world will not be devoid of mankind. (2) Breaking one's sexual desires. (3)

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal, *Musnad al-Imām Aḥmad* (4 vols.; Cairo, 1895), II, 173.

<sup>30</sup> *Qūt al-qulūb*, II, 492.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., I, 151-152.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., II, 492.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

Housekeeping. (4) Abundance of kinfolk. (5) The one Ghazzālī is most interested in: the struggle of the soul and its exercise in ruling and controlling, maintaining the rights of the wives and putting up with their (bad) traits of character, enduring their offensiveness, and struggling to improve them, and guiding them to the way of religion, struggling for lawful gain for their sake, and raising one's children.<sup>34</sup> These are all discussed in considerable detail.

The disadvantages of marriage are three: (1) the most serious is the inability to seek a livelihood from legal endeavors. This is not easy for everyone especially in this day and age in which gaining a livelihood is in such a state of confusion. Marriage may cause a man to give himself too much latitude in seeking a livelihood, and in feeding his family from forbidden activities. Ultimately this will cause his destruction and theirs as well. (2) He may be incapable of performing his duties to his family, that is, not have the patience, endurance, and so forth, mentioned in the fifth advantage. (3) General concern for taking care of his family, working on their behalf and for their future, even if it does not plunge him into forbidden activities, may distract him from God to such an extent that he will have no leisure to think about the other world.<sup>35</sup>

Ghazzālī summarizes the arguments by saying that the rule as to whether marriage or celibacy is best for a particular individual depends on whether or not he can cope with all these matters. He should take the advantages and disadvantages of marriage listed above and use them as a touchstone to test himself. If he finds he has all the advantages, sufficient property legally earned, good character, religion, and that marriage will not distract him from God, and at the same time needs to ease his sexual desires and have someone to take care of his house, there is no question but that he should marry.<sup>36</sup> Ghazzālī admits, however, that few cases are clearcut, so the individual has to weigh the items separately and decide the issue on the basis of the preponderance of advantages over disadvantages or the reverse.

One gets the impression from reading Ghazzālī that he really would have preferred to make a stronger case for celibacy than he was able. Elsewhere in his work he is quite insistent that the Sufi *murīd* (novice) avoid marrying at the beginning of his career, because enjoying his wife will distract him from God. He should not be deceived by the example of the Prophet, who had many wives, for nothing could distract the latter, not even the whole world. Angels are not to be compared with blacksmiths. He quotes approvingly Abū Sulaimān ad-Dārānī, who says, "I never saw a *murīd* who married and remained in his former state (*ḥāl*). . . . *Everything* that distracts you from God—family, money, and even children—is inauspicious for you."<sup>37</sup>

<sup>34</sup> Ghazzālī, II, 22 ff.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., p. 31.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., pp. 31-32.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., III, 87.



The murīd should not marry until he grows strong in knowledge (*ma'rifah*), so long as sexual desire does not overcome him. If it does, he should first try to break it by long fasting and continuous hunger. If this fails to suppress his desire and he is in such a state that he cannot protect his eyes (from looking at women)—even if he can protect his pudenda—then marriage is better for him.<sup>38</sup>

From these discussions we can see that the question of celibacy versus marriage remained a live issue in Islam, but that the impetus to marry was always dominant. The practical considerations of sexual gratification were so strong that the fears that sex and the responsibilities of family life might endanger one's hope of salvation could deter only a very few men from following the course approved by the religious and social norms of Muslim society.

Having disposed of the controversy between legal sex and no sex at all, we can now turn to illegal sex. Some sexual activities that we might expect to find in this category are not there at all, others receive only cursory treatment. For example, our sources say nothing at all about cunnilingus, fellatio or irrumation. Sporadic references to these do occur in other literature, but only as personal insults. The authors of our hadith and akhbār were not aware of them as activities to be reproved or punished.

Incest, likewise, is not dealt with as such. Arabic, in fact, has no word for it since what we conceive of as incest is included in the prohibited degrees of consanguinity for marriage. Our sources contain only two anecdotes on the subject, both rather silly stories, in Ibn al-Jauzī's *Dhamm al-hawā*, one telling of a mother-son relationship and the other of an affair between a brother and sister. Needless to say the guilty parties all come to a bad end.<sup>39</sup> The guilty mother cannot be buried in the local cemetery because the dead refuse to accept her; the sister dies in childbirth and the brother commits suicide.

An interesting sidelight on Muslim pudency in such matters is afforded by the footnotes by the modern editor appended to these stories. "This is one of the ugly stories that Ibn al-Jauzī allowed himself to cite; I wish he had not fallen into this sort of thing. If true, they illustrate the decadence that afflicted medieval society and produced such tragic events."<sup>40</sup> And further: "The only thing that induced Ibn al-Jauzī to tell these two stories was his wish to be complete and exhaust the subject of the evil aspects of love. This sort of thing is found in all literatures."<sup>41</sup>

At the beginning of this paper I stated that morality and the law do not always go hand in hand, so for the next sexual sin it may be appropriate to cite Bousquet's illustration of this point, and let it stand as an example for the others as well. The law is uncertain what to do about masturbation. Ibn Hanbal says it is

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> Abū l-Faraj 'Abd ar-Raḥmān Ibn al-Jauzī, *Dhamm al-hawā* (Cairo, 1381/1962), pp. 448 ff. (hereafter cited as *Dhamm al-hawā*.)

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., p. 453n.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., p. 457n.

the same as letting oneself be bled (and should be judged in the same fashion). Al-'Alā' b. Ziyād said: What does it matter? We used to do that when we were on expeditions. Ḥasan al-Baṣrī: It is only your own water (=sperm). Let it go! Mujāhid: People used to teach this to their young men so they could avoid fornication. Aḍ-Ḍaḥḥāk and others declared it legal in the absence of any proof of its illegality.<sup>42</sup> Abū Ṭālib tells a story, which is repeated by Ghazzālī, that a young man once attended a *majlis* of Ibn 'Abbās. When the meeting broke up, he stayed behind, and after some prodding by Ibn 'Abbās to overcome his embarrassment, he confided to him that because he was unmarried and feared he might commit fornication he sometimes masturbated. Ibn 'Abbās turned away, and said, "*Uffin wa-tuffin!* Marrying a slave girl is better than that, but that is better than adultery (*zinā*)."<sup>43</sup>

The Malikites forbid masturbation; the Hanbalites and some of the Hanafis allow it in order to ease desire. The ahl al-hadith are not so lenient. According to Anas b. Mālik, God destroyed one of the ancient nations because they practiced this vice.<sup>44</sup> Another hadith tells us that "there are seven people whom God will not look at on resurrection day, he will not purify them, nor assemble them together with the rest of the universe. They will be the first to enter the fire—unless they repent, for God forgives whoever repents. They are the masturbator, the active and passive sodomite, the inveterate drinker of wine, the one who beats his parents till they cry for help, the one who offends his neighbors till they curse him, and the man who has intercourse with his neighbor's wife."<sup>45</sup> Even today opinion differs on this issue. A recent fetwa cited by Bousquet states that masturbation is forbidden if it is done for pleasure, but one hopes it will not be counted a grave sin against him who does it to ease his carnal desire.<sup>46</sup> The modern commentator on Tirmidhī's hadith collection, al-Mubārakfūrī (d. 1353/1934-35), after noting that some of the ulama allow it, says: "In masturbation there is great harm to the masturbator in every way. The truth is that masturbation is a forbidden act, not permissible for easing desire or any other reason. Anyone who declares it legal to ease desire is extremely careless and does not consider the harm that is in it. This is my opinion, and God knows best."<sup>47</sup>

Our literature speaks briefly but clearly on the matter of bestiality. A hadith of the Prophet states, "Whomever you find who has had intercourse with an animal, kill him and kill the animal."<sup>48</sup>

The ahl al-hadith differ with one another on the matter of coitus interruptus (*'azl*). Jābir addresses the Prophet: "O Prophet of God, we used to withdraw, but

<sup>42</sup> Bousquet, p. 58.

<sup>43</sup> *Qūt al-qulūb*, II, 493; Ghazzālī, II, 27.

<sup>44</sup> *Qūt al-qulūb*, II, 493.

<sup>45</sup> *Dhamm al-hawā*, p. 207.

<sup>46</sup> Bousquet, p. 58.

<sup>47</sup> Tirmidhī, 9.1 (IV, 199).

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 15.23 (V, 19).



the Jews assert that this practice is the lesser burial alive of infants [the reference is to the ancient Arab custom of burying female infants alive].” He replies: “The Jews lied. If God wants to create it [the fetus], this action will not prevent it.”<sup>49</sup> Another hadith also stems from Jābir who says, “We used to practice withdrawal during the period in which the Koran was being revealed.” Abū Sa’id al-Khudrī says they asked the Prophet about it, and he said, “Do you really do that? Every soul that is destined to be will be from now till the resurrection.”<sup>50</sup> On the other hand the definition of coitus interruptus as the lesser burial alive, denounced by the Prophet above, is elsewhere ascribed to Ibn ‘Abbās.<sup>51</sup> ‘Alī is said to have disapproved of it strongly, considering it a bit of hidden polytheism. Abū Ṭālib says that none of the best of the pious practiced it, and the least thing wrong with it is refusing to rely on God and dissatisfaction with God’s decree.<sup>52</sup>

The mukhannath (or: transvestite) is also thoroughly despised although he is, curiously enough, not classed with the sodomites. Ibn Abī d-Dunyā relates the story that in the Prophet’s lifetime there were three mukhannathūn, whose names he gives. One, named Māti’, belonged to Fākhitha bt. ‘Amr, the Prophet’s maternal aunt. He used to visit the Prophet’s wives freely, until one day, before the siege of aṭ-Ṭā’if, the Prophet heard him say to Khālid b. al-Walid, “If you take aṭ-Ṭā’if tomorrow, don’t let Bādiya bt. Ghailān escape, for she comes toward you with four and goes away with eight (*tuqbilu bi-arba’in wa-tudbiru bi-thamānin*). In Bukhārī, who relates the story with some variants, it is explained that this cryptic phrase refers to the four folds of her stomach which overlap at the back to form eight. Whatever the meaning, it must be something indecent, for it showed the Prophet that Māti’ knew more about sex than he had thought. The mukhannath was forbidden to visit the Prophet’s wives and was banished from Medina. Later the Prophet relented and he was allowed to come into town on Saturdays to beg. This continued through the reigns of Abū Bakr and ‘Umar.<sup>53</sup>

In other hadith the Prophet curses men who act like women and women who act like men,<sup>54</sup> and says that people should expel them from their houses.<sup>55</sup>

Anal intercourse is invariably condemned. The Prophet calls anal intercourse with a woman “the lesser sodomy” (*al-lūṭiyya aṣ-ṣuḡhrā*).<sup>56</sup> Ibn ‘Abbās interprets the Koran, Sura 27:54 *a-ta’tūna l-fāḥishata*, as meaning “men’s anuses.”<sup>57</sup> And

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 9.37 (IV, 287).

<sup>50</sup> Bukhārī, 67.96 (III, 448).

<sup>51</sup> *Qūt al-qulūb*, II, 522.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

<sup>53</sup> Ibn Abī d-Dunyā, *Dhamm al-malāhī*, f. 14b; cf. Bukhārī, 77.62 (IV, 94-95).

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 77.62 (IV, 94).

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., 77.61 (IV, 94).

<sup>56</sup> Abū Dā’ūd aṭ-Ṭayālīsī, *Musnad*, no. 2266.

<sup>57</sup> Ibn Abī d-Dunyā, *Dhamm al-malāhī*, f. 13b.

Jābir says that the respect due (*ḥurma*) the anus is greater than that due the pudenda.<sup>58</sup>

The two cardinal sexual sins for the Muslims are sodomy and zinā both of which, as mentioned above, are forbidden in the Koran. Sodomy is denounced in particularly extravagant terms. Whenever a male mounts another male, the throne of God trembles; the angels look on in loathing and say, Lord, why do you not command the earth to punish them and the heavens to rain stones on them? God replies, "I am forebearing; nothing will escape me."<sup>59</sup> The Prophet curses the sodomite in several hadith,<sup>60</sup> and warns his people against the practice. "The thing I fear most for my community is the act of the people of Lot."<sup>61</sup> In another version he adds, "Indeed, my community will suffer punishment if men go with men and women with women."<sup>62</sup> Lesbianism is not often referred to in our sources and then usually in connection with male sodomy. Women are, however, blamed for having practiced the vice for forty years among the tribe of Lot before the men took it up.<sup>63</sup>

The vice of sodomy is so disgusting that of all the animals only pigs and asses engage in it.<sup>64</sup> Bukhārī reports an opinion from ash-Sha'bī, transmitted by Yaḥyā al-Kindī, that if a man commits sodomy with a boy and achieves penetration, he is no longer permitted to marry the boy's mother, but he rejects this khabar because Yaḥyā is not a reliable transmitter.<sup>65</sup>

The ahl al-hadith seem to have had less concern about homosexual relations between adult males than they had for relations between a man and a boy. This was not out of sympathy for the boy, but simply because boys were a greater temptation. Sufyān ath-Thaurī defines sodomy by saying, "If a man played with the toes of a boy desiring sensual pleasure (*yurīdu shahwa*), that would be sodomy." <sup>66</sup> Al-Ḥasan b. Dhakwān said, "Don't sit with the sons of the rich, for they have features like women, and they are a worse temptation than virgins."<sup>67</sup> An anonymous successor said, "I have less fear for a pious young man from a ravening beast than from a beardless boy who sits with him."<sup>68</sup> "A man should never spend the night in a house with beardless boys."<sup>69</sup>

<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

<sup>59</sup> *Dhamm al-hawā*, p. 199.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., p. 197.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., p. 198; Ibn Abī d-Dunyā, *Dhamm al-malāhī*, f. 12a.

<sup>62</sup> *Dhamm al-hawā*, p. 198.

<sup>63</sup> Ibn Abī d-Dunyā, *Dhamm al-malāhī*, f. 13b.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid., f. 14b.

<sup>65</sup> Bukhārī, 67.24 (III, 421).

<sup>66</sup> Ibn Abī d-Dunyā, *Dhamm al-malāhī*, f. 12b.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., f. 13a.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., f. 12b.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid.



The ahl al-hadith are almost unanimous in holding that the sodomite should be punished by stoning, just as the adulterer is. All the hadith, and most of the akhbār, that they report insist on the death penalty. Certain refinements, otherwise unknown to Islam, are proposed. Abū Bakr, at the suggestion of 'Alī, who bases his opinion on the destruction of Sodom, is said to have had sodomites burned.<sup>70</sup> Ibn 'Abbās proposed that the sodomite should be thrown head foremost off the highest building in town, and then stoned.<sup>71</sup> Only after citing twenty-odd hadith and akhbār of similar import does Ibn al-Jauzī, somewhat reluctantly it seems, mention that al-Ḥakam holds that the sodomite ought to be beaten with fewer strokes than the usual *ḥadd*, and that Abū Ḥanīfah inclined to this view.<sup>72</sup>

The sodomite will suffer dreadful tortures and humiliation in the next world. He will be resurrected in the form of a pig or a monkey.<sup>73</sup> or he will be resurrected along with the original tribe of Lot.<sup>74</sup> As mentioned above, he will, along with six other groups of sinners, be the first to be thrown into hell.<sup>75</sup> According to a *khuṭba* delivered by the Prophet, he will be enclosed in a coffin of fire and nailed down with nails of red-hot iron, which will penetrate his face and body one by one.<sup>76</sup> Ibn 'Abbās says that on the day of resurrection he will come out in disgrace above the heads of the crowd with his penis hung on the anus of his companion.<sup>77</sup>

Ghazzālī, as one would expect, takes a very severe view of sodomy. He says that if the murīd can keep from looking at women lustfully, but cannot keep from looking at boys, marriage is better for him. The evil in boys is greater, for he may legalize his desire for a woman by marrying, but it is forbidden to look at a boy with lust; indeed, anyone whose heart is affected by the beauty of a boy, even to the extent that he can perceive any difference between him and a bearded man, is forbidden to look at him at all. Ghazzālī quotes a man of the salaf who says, "There are three types of sodomite in this community, those who look, those who touch, and those who do the act." Ghazzālī continues, "The harm of looking at youths is great, and whenever the murīd is unable to lower his eyes and control his thoughts, the right thing for him to do is to marry. Many's the soul whose longing cannot be cured by hunger."<sup>78</sup>

The sin of zinā, illegal intercourse between a man and a woman, is likewise forbidden by the Koran. "Do not commit zinā, it is indecent and an evil way" (Sura 17:37) and according to the Koran it is to be punished with a hundred

<sup>70</sup> Ibid., f. 13a; *Dhamm al-hawā*, p. 203.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid., p. 205.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid., p. 209.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid., p. 208.

<sup>75</sup> See above, p. 35.

<sup>76</sup> *Dhamm al-hawā*, p. 208.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid., p. 209.

<sup>78</sup> Ghazzālī, III, 88.

strokes (Sura 24:2). Although in actuality zinā is undoubtedly the most common of all sexual sins, the denunciations of it are not expressed in language as immoderate as that against sodomy. The reason for this may be that the sexual ethics of Islam were worked out by men, who, from the Prophet on down, had normal sexual instincts. Though they condemned zinā, it was at least something they could understand, whereas sodomy they could only conceive of as willful sin.

The effort of the Muslims to elaborate on the Koranic statements about zinā is older than similar efforts with respect to sodomy and predates the time when we can properly identify a group as the "ahl al-hadith." The earliest attempt at this is found in the famous *āyat ar-rajm*, a clearly spurious verse, that some early moralists claimed was an authentic part of the Koran. As put together by F. Schwally, the verse runs: "Do not despise your forefathers for that is disbelief. If a married man (*shaikh*) and married woman (*shaikhah*) commit zinā, stone them as a punishment from God. God is all-knowing, all-wise."<sup>79</sup>

'Umar is said to have upheld the authenticity of this verse, and it is quite possible that the new punishment for zinā was instituted during his reign. The verse, however, must represent someone's effort to justify a newly approved practice that was not sanctioned by the Koran. The normal way to do this in later times was through inventing hadith. The verse could hardly have been invented after the promulgation of the Uthmanic recension of the Koran, which means that it must be quite old. In any case, the change from flogging to stoning must have occurred very early.

The hadith and akhbār clearly establish stoning as the ḥadd for zinā by a person who is muḥṣan, and, as we have come to expect, they inveigh against the sin as well. It is not, however, the worst of sins. It ranks third, behind creating an equal to God and killing your children out of fear that they will consume your property.<sup>80</sup>

Zinā causes faith to leave the perpetrator. The Prophet says, "When the servant of God commits zinā, faith departs from him and remains above his head like a shadow; when he leaves off that action faith returns to him."<sup>81</sup> Another tradition: "A man does not commit zinā or steal, while he is a believer, but repentance is offered."<sup>82</sup> "Faith is the coat of mail with which God protects whom he pleases; when a servant commits zinā, the armor of faith is stripped off him, but when he repents, it is returned to him."<sup>83</sup> "After polytheism there is no sin greater in the sight of God than a drop of semen that a man places in a womb that is not lawful for him."<sup>84</sup> "The people of heaven are blown upon by a sweet-smelling breeze.

<sup>79</sup> Theodor Nöldeke, *Geschichte des Qorāns*, 2te Auflage, bearb. von Friedrich Schwally *et al.* (3 vols in 1; Leipzig, 1909-1938), I, 348 f.

<sup>80</sup> *Dhamm al-hawā*, p. 195; Abū Dā'ūd al-Ṭayālīsī *Musnad*, no. 264.

<sup>81</sup> Tirmidhī, 38.11 (VII, 376).

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, 38.11 (VII, 374); cf. Bukhārī, 86.1 (IV, 292).

<sup>83</sup> *Dhamm al-hawā*, p. 190.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*



They are told that it is the scent from the mouths of those who fast. The people of hell are afflicted by a dreadful stench; they are told that this is the smell from the pudenda of adulterers."<sup>85</sup> In a story going back to 'Alī the same stench afflicts the people on judgment day. They are told that it is from the pudenda of adulterers who have come before God in their adultery, without having repented.<sup>86</sup>

In looking over the hadith and akhbār that treat the sexual sins, we can clearly discern a steady increase over the years in the severity with which such offenses were looked on in Muslim society. One can only speculate as to why this should have happened. Doubtless the reasons are complex, and we can suggest here only a few possibilities. One reason may be historical. Islam was in the process of supplanting the main religions of the region. The Muslims may have felt that they could not really appear to be less strict than the older religions over which God had given them victory. Stoning as a punishment for adultery and killing the animal in cases of bestiality are clearly taken from the Old Testament, so one may suspect likewise that at work was the influence of converts who may have felt uncomfortable at the apparently slack legislation on sexual irregularities in their newly adopted faith.

Another reason might be called literary. Some of the hadith, in particular those against sodomy with beardless boys, seem to be in response to the sudden appearance of pederasty as a literary theme in early Abbasid poetry. Sodomy was doubtless at all times practiced by some people, but there was no reason for such an outburst of vituperation, unless it attracted attention to itself. Known cases of sodomy in Umayyad times are extremely rare; they become more common later on but not so common as the popularity of the theme in poetry might lead us to think. Since the ahl al-hadith themselves engaged in a literary effort, it is not surprising that they should be sensitive to what was going on in other literary movements. They would naturally react strongly to influences they considered degrading and a threat to the salvation of the Muslims, whose spiritual guidance they felt themselves obliged to undertake.

And finally another reason may be simple inertia. When a movement, even a literary movement, gathers force, it cannot be stopped except by a stronger force. The ahl al-hadith were a popular force, and there is no doubt that their activity was approved and welcomed by the great majority of the members of Muslim society; otherwise they could not possibly have been so influential. Under such circumstances it was only natural that these professional moralizers tended to increase the severity of their judgments. To do otherwise would have been to disappoint the expectations of their audience, who, like the professionals themselves, could never have accepted any doctrine of sexual morality that held that certain acts always considered sinful were not sinful after all, or were morally indifferent.

So the tendency to increased severity in sexual morality, as reflected in the

<sup>85</sup> Ibid., p. 192.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid., p. 196.

hadith and akhbār literature, is understandable on several grounds. If for some reason the popular feeling in Muslim society had gone in the other direction, sexual matters would have doubtless dropped out of the literature altogether, and the ahl al-hadith would have limited themselves to other topics for which they were sure of finding a popular following.

Another, even more serious, question arises in connection with sex and Muslim society. What effect, if any, did this way of inculcating sexual morality have on the morality of Muslim society? For this question too we can suggest only a tentative answer, because we know too little about the sexual conduct of Muslims before and after the rise of this literary genre to make comparisons. The reluctance of Muslims to discuss their sex lives makes such data difficult to obtain even for the modern period, and it is almost impossible, except in isolated instances, for the Middle Ages.

Although we cannot come to any conclusions on sexual conduct as such, I believe that we can credit the hadith and akhbār literature, together with its derivatives, with producing a profound change in sexual attitudes. This literature must have been the prime factor in producing the sense of pudency in Muslims which I have frequently referred to. Indeed, no other determining factor can be discerned. It is not enjoined by the law, which cannot enforce it in any case; there are hadith that urge it, as we have shown, and there is good evidence that it has increased with the passage of time. It is much more difficult today to publish an obscene book in the Muslim world than in the West, and, as we saw above, Muslims sometimes show embarrassment at the frankness of the works produced by their ancestors in the Middle Ages.

An attitude of mind shared by many people is the most important factor in the creation of a moral code. If people violate a moral code but still respect it, it will remain in force; if they violate it out of principle, that is, because they really are following a different moral code, the old one will not long endure. The hadith and akhbār literature is the strongest persuasive and didactic instrument that Muslim society has produced for the purpose of maintaining respect for the sunna of the Prophet among the members of that society. Its influence can best be judged in terms of its success or failure in performing this function. Anyone who knows Muslims and Islam must be aware that this respect continues virtually unabated in Islamic countries today. Even in those countries where the greatest changes have occurred in the legal system, no one attacks the sunna of the Prophet as such. Slavery, polygamy, and child marriage may disappear without any diminution of the sunna, for the sunna, though it regulates these matters, does not require that any of them be preserved. On the other hand, Muslim society shares with other societies an improved ability to control the conduct of its members, through the more efficient police and court systems that have evolved in modern times. So it may be that the sexual morality preached in the hadith and akhbār literature will ultimately be more scrupulously observed in Muslim society than it ever has been in the past.



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# THE SEXUAL MORES OF THE COMMON PEOPLE

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Gustave E. von Grunebaum, in his essay "The Nature of the Fatimid Achievement," quotes Aristotle, who said of Epimenides, the great seer, that "he used to divine not the future, but only things that were past, but obscure." Von Grunebaum adds that the historian's role is not always alien to such a mission.<sup>1</sup>

I find myself in a similar situation today because the very topic of my paper, "The Sexual Mores of the Common People," lends itself to obfuscation. The Muslim injunction of *satr al-'awra*, the covering of the private parts of the body—which for women meant almost the entire body—was not merely a matter of religious ritual; it reflected a strong social attitude of the common people who took religion seriously. The opulent and the mighty, the more they felt themselves secure in their wealth and power, the more they loosened their tongues and secluded their wives. The *littérateurs*, who frequented the courts of the princes and the palaces of the rich, have provided us with abundant and unrestrained reports about sex as it was discussed and practiced in those circles. Some of the sophisticated leaders of religious law and thought, who feared God but were confident of their own merits and trusted in God's mercy, were similarly inclined to allow themselves certain freedoms with regard to sex and other matters and did not mince words on such topics. At the other end of the social ladder, the people who were not *mastūr*—literally, not covered, not protected by their means, family, and social standing, in short, not respectable—had had little power to seclude their wives, and no cause to restrain their tongues. Their voice is heard in the chronologically later parts of *Thousand Nights and a Night* and in similar literature.

The sexual mores of the bulk of the urban population, the great masses of skilled craftsmen and artisans, respectable shopkeepers, and middle class merchants, are less well known. Abdelwahab Bouhdiba in his grand dissertation on Islam and sex repeatedly speaks of "all layers of Muslim society," but he does not

<sup>1</sup> *Colloque international sur l'histoire du Caire, 27 mars-5 avril 1969*, (Cairo: Ministry of Culture of the Arab Republic of Egypt, n.d. [1972]), p. 199.



seem to have paid special attention to the problem of differentiation raised here.<sup>2</sup> Historians had little opportunity to speak of the middle class. Books of entertainment, if systematically analyzed according to the social groups that they address, promise important results, but more work is still to be done in this respect. Much is to be expected also from a careful perusal of Islamic religious literature, since a large number of its creators came from families engaged in crafts or commerce or were themselves involved in such occupations. May I draw attention to an extensive paper by Dr. Hayyim J. Cohen (which is a condensation of a Ph.D. dissertation written under my supervision) on the socioeconomic backgrounds and mundane occupations of Muslim religious scholars during the first five centuries of Islam. Of the 14,000 biographies examined, about 4,200 yielded information that proved that classical Islamic religious literature was to a considerable extent the creation of a mercantile middle class.<sup>3</sup> But writers of books naturally have a purpose: they intend to make a point, to state, prove, or preach something; they address a public. We should like to hear the unadulterated voice of the common man, when he speaks in private, occupied with his own daily concerns, not *voicing* opinions, but revealing them inadvertently.

In this respect I am able to make a contribution, although a very modest and very limited one; I am referring, of course, to my study of the thousands of letters and documents from the so-called Cairo Geniza, most of which were written in the Arabic language and in Hebrew characters by Jews living during the Fatimid and Ayyubid periods.<sup>4</sup> The difficulties inherent in the use of this material in general and for the study of medieval Near Eastern social history in particular I have pointed out on various occasions.<sup>5</sup> These difficulties are compounded by the fact alluded to earlier, namely, that respectable persons of the lower and middle middle class were extremely reticent with regard to anything that smacked of sex, to the extent that in the heart of the classical Geniza period, the eleventh century, one would not dare to put on paper even a word with so harmless a sexual connotation as "my wife." One did not write "my wife," *zawjatī*, but "the one who is with me," *man 'indī*, or similar circumlocutions which sometimes were very awkward. The Geniza has preserved more than two hundred and fifty letters

<sup>2</sup> *Isl. et sexualité*, thèse présenté devant l'Université de Paris V le 3 Juin 1972, Service de reproduction des thèses, Université de Lille III (Lille, 1973) (hereafter Bouhdiba, *Sexualité*).

<sup>3</sup> Hayyim J. Cohen, "The Economic Background and the Secular Occupations of Muslim Jurisprudents and Traditionists in the Classical Period of Islam (until the Middle of the Eleventh Century)," *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient*, 13 (1970), 16-61.

<sup>4</sup> *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2d ed., II, 987-989, s.v. "Geniza"; S. D. Goitein, *A Mediterranean Society: The Jewish Communities of the Arab World as Portrayed in the Documents of the Cairo Geniza*, Vol. I, *Economic Foundations* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1967), Introduction, pp. 1-28 (hereafter *Med. Soc.*). (Vol. II, *The Community* [1971]; Vol. III, *The Family* [1978]).

<sup>5</sup> See "The Documents of the Cairo Geniza as a Source for Islamic Social History," in *Studies in Islamic History and Institutions* (Leiden, 1966), pp. 279-294 (written at an early stage of my Geniza research).

addressed to Nahray ben Nissim, a merchant banker from Qayrawan, Tunisia, who had settled in Egypt, by means of which we are able to follow his fortunes for a full fifty years, from 1045 through 1095. Many of the letters were written by close relatives and friends, and often contain references to matters other than business. But nowhere are greetings extended to his wife, and needless to say, Nahray himself never mentions her in his own letters of which we have about twenty-five. We know the names of his son and his daughter, we hear much about his mother and something about his sister, but we do not know the names of the two wives whom he survived. The name of the third who outlived him is known only from a legal document written after his death.<sup>6</sup>

The Geniza contains innumerable details about a woman's wardrobe and ornaments, but practically nothing about her physical appearance. When a young schoolmaster, who lived far away from home, apprised his mother of his marriage, he assured her that her prayers had been heard and that his young wife possessed all the wonderful qualities of character that he had always admired in his mother. This is said in Arabic, like the rest of the letter. But the additional praise of the girl, namely, that she was very beautiful, is expressed in Hebrew, as we would use Latin when we are in doubt about the propriety of what we are saying.<sup>7</sup>

In the face of such difficulties I must adopt Gustave von Grunebaum's advice and try, like Epimenides, to divine what the common people thought and did about sex in Geniza times. I venture to do so because I feel myself almost one of them. During the last few years I have become as much at home on the *murabba'at al-'aṭṭārīn*, "the Square of the Perfumers," or the *sūq al-qanādīl*, "the Bazaar of the Lamps," at the corner of the 'Amr mosque of Fustat as at Princeton, New Jersey.<sup>8</sup>

The limitations of the materials to be presented are self-evident. The first is the provenance of my texts. As far as commerce is concerned, the Geniza is a first-rate source for both the Mediterranean and the India trades. For such matters as sex and family life, however, our information comes mainly from Egypt itself and, in particular, from its ancient Islamic capital, Fustat. But has not Fustat been censured by visitors and by newcomers from other Muslim countries, including Moses Maimonides, for the looseness of its sexual mores? Al-Muqaddasi, a native of the holy and virtuous city of Jerusalem, says simply: "In Fustat every wife has two husbands."<sup>9</sup> A somewhat malicious religious legend was invented to explain the dominant position allegedly enjoyed by Egyptian women. When Pharaoh and

<sup>6</sup> The mother of Nahray's children died late in his life. The fact that he married again is known to us solely from a legal document, by which the widow purchased a maidservant about thirteen years after her husband's death (*Med. Soc.*, I, p. 137, n. 39).

<sup>7</sup> TS 16.277, trans. in *Gratz College Annual of Jewish Studies*, IV (Philadelphia, 1975), pp. 61-64. (For the meaning of the marks of the Geniza manuscripts see *Med. Soc.*, I, xix-xxvi.)

<sup>8</sup> *Med. Soc.*, II, 263-264.

<sup>9</sup> Al-Muqaddasi, *Aḥsan al-taqāsīm fī ma'rifat al-aqālim*, ed. M. J. de Goeje (Leiden, 1906), p. 200, l. 5, and p. 166, l. 3 (on the chastity of the people of Jerusalem).



his host were drowned in the Red Sea, the widows, instead of remaining unmarried, freed their slaves and hirelings and took them as husbands. But they imposed on them the condition that throughout all generations the husbands should be obeisant to their wives. "Look at the Copts," meaning the really native Egyptians, concludes the narrator of that story, "When you make a deal with a Copt and you believe you are through with him, what does he say to you: 'Wait, I must go home first and ask my wife.'"<sup>10</sup>

Be that as it may, as far as the Geniza people are concerned, the great majority of them were newcomers to Egypt or sons of immigrants. They represent a fair cross-section of the Arabic-speaking population of the Mediterranean and southwest Asian areas, from Iran and Iraq in the East to Morocco and Spain in the west. Nahray b. Nissīm was a Tunisian, and most of his friends and acquaintances were also Westerners. Thus the sexual mores to be studied by us should not be regarded as specifically Egyptian.

A far more serious limitation is the fact that the writers of the Geniza letters were Jews, members of a minority group. To be sure, the role of Christians and Jews under Islam should never be likened to the familiar picture of the Jew in medieval Europe. In Europe the Jews were strangers, a tiny, irritating minority, that was confined to a few, and hateful, occupations, and used Hebrew as means of literary expression, not Latin, the language of general culture. In Islamic countries, the Christians and Jews were old-timers, indigenous to that area and found in almost all walks of life. During the High Middle Ages there were neither occupational nor geographical ghettos, the linguistic assimilation to the Muslim majority had become almost complete, and participation in its cultural life was far-reaching.

With regard to family life and sexual mores, however, matters so intimately connected with religion and social standing, the situation was different. The seclusion of women was far tighter in Islam than in Christianity and Judaism. Christian and Jewish women were required to cover their hair and to dress modestly, but they were not obliged to veil their faces and they could talk to a man of another family without incurring opprobrium. This contrast is beautifully illustrated in a legal question submitted to Moses Maimonides. A Jewish and a Christian family lived in one house. Such arrangements were common. One day the Christian embraced Islam; this change, as the letter emphasizes, caused great inconvenience to the female members of the Jewish household.<sup>11</sup> In the Geniza letters it is taken for granted that a man unrelated to the family could come into a home and discuss matters with the woman of the house in the absence of her husband. Since women were very much involved in economic matters, there was ample opportunity for such encounters.

Islam was uneasy with regard to the admission of women to public services in

<sup>10</sup> Al-Maqrīzī, *Khīṭaṭ* (Bulāq, 1270/1853), I, 39, ll. 6-10.

<sup>11</sup> *Med. Soc.*, II, 292-293.

the mosque. In contrast, the churches and synagogues of Fustat had women's galleries, frequented by girls and married women. The entrance to the gallery was through a so-called secret or women's door, a *bâb al-sirr* or *bâb al-nisâ*, located on a street different from that into which the main gate opened. It should be noted that the same special entrance for women was found in any large private home. But in the synagogue *court* men and women mixed freely. In a letter a woman could write to a man: "When we met last Saturday in the synagogue we discussed such-and-such a matter." Thus the basic attitude toward the seclusion of women was not the same in the minority and majority populations.<sup>12</sup>

Concubinage with one's slave girl was another and even more serious contrast between Islam and the older religions. Cohabitation with a girl whom one could buy and sell on the market was as legal and natural in Islam as marriage to a free woman. In Christianity and Judaism this practice was anathema. To be sure, in the Hebrew Bible concubinage with one's slave girl was legal as it was in Islam. Only in post-biblical times, when concubinage with foreign women menaced the very character of Jewish religion, did opposition to it become extreme. This attitude persisted in Christianity.<sup>13</sup>

According to the Bible, sexual relations between males were to be punished by death.<sup>14</sup> Even in late Roman times, when the Near East and the Mediterranean world had been impregnated with Greek and Iranian ideas about pederasty, it was still asserted that such practices were not found among Jews.<sup>15</sup> Nor do I find that homosexuality played a significant role in pre-Islamic Arabia. Its immense spread in early Islamic times has, to my mind, little to do with Islam as a religion or with the Arabs as a race. It was the outcome of the superimposition of a caste of warlike conquerors over a vast defenseless population. The steamrollers of the Assyrian, Babylonian, Persian, Macedonian, and Roman conquests had crushed all the independent nations of the Ancient Near East. What remained was human dust, a population that was not accustomed to bearing arms and was unable to fight. Any conqueror, whether Arab, Turk, or Mongol, could take what he liked. After the endless supply of girls of all races, colors, shapes and personalities had been tasted, the oversatiated and refined appetites had to be satisfied elsewhere.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 144-145. Attention is drawn to al-Bukhârî, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, Adhân, para. 163, where 'Ā'isha, the Prophet's favorite wife, is cited as prohibiting women from entering the mosque, saying, "had the Messenger of God known what the women do in public gatherings, he would have prohibited them from attending, as the Children of Israel have done with their women." I see in this legend an allusion to the separation of sexes in medieval synagogues and Oriental churches ("Children of Israel" means both Christians and Jews). Quoted by Moshe Perlmann, "A Seventeenth Century Exhortation Concerning al-Aqṣâ," *Israel Oriental Studies*, Vol. III (Tel Aviv, 1973), p. 263.

<sup>13</sup> Details in *Med. Soc.*, III, 147-148.

<sup>14</sup> Leviticus 20:13.

<sup>15</sup> In both Palestinian and Babylonian sources, see Saul Lieberman, *Tosefta Ki-Fshutah* (New York, 1973), part VIII, p. 980.



Thus the cult of the ephebes, or attractive male youths, originally was a privilege of the men in power. But as often happens with social mores, the example of the ruling classes filtered down, and became a style of life for the entire community. A poor schoolmaster teaching the Qur'ān, who did not have the means to marry a wife or to satisfy his desires in a more transitory fashion, would pick up a boy, or several boys from his class. The North African writer Rachid Boujedra, in his autobiographical novel *La Répudiation*, describes himself as a victim of such an occurrence, but does so in a rather casual manner. Such happenings, he writes, were common, parents generally knew about them, but preferred to close their eyes and mouths in order not to injure the bearer of the Holy Scripture.<sup>16</sup> Thus we see that what in one civilization was regarded as a horrid crime was looked upon by another as a tolerable pattern of behavior.

Up to this point it might appear that regarding the seclusion of women, concubinage with slave girls, and pederasty there was a marked difference between the minority population and the majority. The findings of the Geniza seem to indicate that this assumption is true only in part. The social notions of the majority population were very influential. Consequently, testimony about the attitudes and behavior of the Geniza people throws some interesting sidelights on the mores of the larger society.

According to the socioeconomic conditions of the time, for the majority of the population, sexual satisfaction had to be obtained through marriage. Our discussion of this situation is best opened with a Muslim marriage contract, a document from the year 1207, by which a merchant in the little Egyptian town of al-Bahnasā married the daughter of a clothier, promising her a *mahr*, or nuptial gift, of 35 dinars. This is a typical case of a lower middle class marriage. We have only a few Muslim marriage contracts from that period, but the Geniza has preserved hundreds of Jewish documents of that type. The proem or introduction of that Muslim contract is quite outspoken with regard to the role of sex in marriage:<sup>17</sup>

Praise be to God who permitted marriage in accordance with the rules and laws of the noble religion, who helps a man favored by him to find in marriage what is permitted and to avoid what is forbidden and made it an ornament for the Muslim faith of a man.

Praise be to him who made marriage a shield and safeguard against vice and prompted to it the true-believers in order to keep them clean from all blemish.

<sup>16</sup> Rachid Boujedra, *La Répudiation* (Paris, 1970), pp. 106-107, quoted in Bouhdiba, *Sexualité*, pp. 468-469.

<sup>17</sup> Hamburger Staats and Universitäts-Bibliothek, A. P. 1, ed. Albert Dietrich, "Eine arabische Eheurkunde aus der Aiyūbidenzeit," *Documenta Islamica Inedita* (Berlin, 1952), p. 125, ll. 2-3.

In short, marriage was instituted by God, so that the partners could find full sexual satisfaction without being forced to seek it illicitly. Only the male partner is mentioned, probably because it was assumed that women were protected by their natural bashfulness. This attitude toward marriage reflects ancient Near Eastern wisdom, as it is expressed, for instance, in an often quoted passage from the Book of Proverbs (5:15-21), which, in abbreviated form, runs like this: "Drink water from your own cistern, rejoice in the wife of your youth, why should you become infatuated with a stranger." A Geniza sermon in praise of marriage describes the wife as a protecting wall surrounding her husband.<sup>18</sup> A poor man imploring his wife to return to him, after she had fled to her relatives, was assuring her that, in the future, *she* would be the queen and he the slave, explains: "Living without a wife in Cairo is very difficult for blameless and chaste persons." In Arabic: *al-'uzūbiyya lil-aḥrār wa-dhawī 'l-'iffa fī 'l-Qāhira ṣa'ba jiddan*. The word *aḥrār*, translated as "blameless," literally means "free," namely of blemish, a usage found before in Greek and Coptic papyri. Thus, in order to get *ḥurriyya*, "freedom," from public censure one had to take upon himself the yoke of marriage. A fully grown man without a wife was regarded as living in sin, and it was not easy for him to find an apartment for himself. Widowers, unlike widows, rarely remained unmarried.<sup>19</sup>

I have not referred to Jewish marriage contracts, because they were substantially pre-Islamic in form and concerned mostly with legal and practical matters. The proems, in contracts that had them, contained wishes for good luck, that is, happiness in marriage and success in building a house, which means having children. Sex is only referred to in the legal section of the contract, namely, as an obligation of the husband toward his wife. Since this was a contractual undertaking, its extent had to be defined. How much sex? Naturally, the question was discussed by the students of law, and they came to the reasonable conclusion that this depended upon the customs of the social ambience to which the couple belonged. As for the scholars themselves, once a week was regarded as sufficient, and the proper time for absolving oneself of this marital duty was the holy night of the week, the one preceding the Sabbath, the day of rest. Since every Jew liked to look upon himself as a scholar, it became the rule, and failure to observe it entailed legal consequences. For instance, when a husband quarreled with his wife and stayed away from home, as frequently happened, he had to come back for the weekend; otherwise he could be sued.<sup>20</sup> A merchant, writing to his wife in Cairo from a port on the route to India, describes how much he suffered from their long separation, how much he was yearning for her, and how much he regretted being unable to provide her with what was her

<sup>18</sup> Mosseri A 68, based on a Talmudic source.

<sup>19</sup> Geniza data about this in *Med. Soc.*, III, 53.

<sup>20</sup> Westminster College, Arabica, II, f. 51.



legal right on Sabbaths and holidays.<sup>21</sup> Of a woman temporarily separated from her husband one would say: "She has neither holiday nor Sabbath."<sup>22</sup>

In reality, it seems, this sexual regimen was neither specifically Jewish nor peculiar to scholars. For Muslims, the night preceding Friday, their holy day, played a similar role, and I suspect that the entire matter had its origin in ancient Greek medical advice on sound hygiene. In classical Athens a husband was bound to visit his wife three times during a month, which presupposes the same frequency of connubial duties. The only difference was perhaps that rabbinical Judaism in this, as in other matters, was a bit more formal and regulative and tended to surround sociohygienic advice with a religious halo.<sup>23</sup>

The term "Rabbinical Judaism," as I may remark in passing, designates the bulk of the Jewish community, those who follow the teachings of the sages of the Talmud. The Karaites, a Jewish sect that took shape in early Islamic times and accepted solely the authority of the Bible, held a different view about our topic. They regarded sexual relations as a desecration of the holy day of Sabbath and prohibited them. Certain circles in the Ethiopian Church observed similar prohibitions with regard to Sunday.

I have brought in here the Karaites, not simply in connection with this somewhat delicate specific issue, but for a more general reason. The Karaite sect, as just stated, originated under Islam, and in its fully developed form, as it appears in the writings of the Karaite authors of the tenth century, clearly betrays the influence of Islamic theology, ritual, and law. But there was more to it. The Karaites of the tenth and eleventh centuries mostly belonged to the upper middle class, the class of the great merchants, physicians, and government officials. They were the true representatives of that rise of the Middle Eastern bourgeoisie in early Islamic times which I have tried to describe in my book *Studies in Islamic History and Institutions*.<sup>24</sup> If we wish to know what was regarded, say, at the end of the fourth century of Islam, as the proper relationship between husband and wife, we should turn to the Karaite marriage contract as it was standardized at approximately that time. The relevant section from a document written in Jerusalem on January 26, 1028, that is, almost a thousand years ago, may serve as an example. It has the form of a mutual declaration by the groom Hezekiah (a Hebrew biblical name), and the bride, Sarwa, "Cypress" (which is Arabic). Sarwa received as her marriage gift 40 dinars, approximately the same sum as that mentioned in the Muslim marriage contract from al-Bahnasā referred to earlier, which indicates that she belonged to the lower middle class. The section opens

<sup>21</sup> See S. D. Goitein, *Letters of Medieval Jewish Traders*, trans. from the Arabic (Princeton, 1973), p. 222.

<sup>22</sup> TS 10 J 16, f. 14, ll. 20-21.

<sup>23</sup> Friday: *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2d ed., II, 593, s.v. "Djum'ah"; Athens: S. B. Pomeroy, *Goddesses, Whores, Wives and Slaves: Women in Classical Antiquity* (New York, 1975), p. 87.

<sup>24</sup> (Leiden, 1966), pp. 217-241.

with the usual offer of marriage, the declaration of the groom, made before the elders of the community.<sup>25</sup>

I, Hezekiah, the bridegroom, will provide her with clothing, cover, and food, supply all her needs and wishes according to my ability and to the extent I can afford. I will conduct myself toward her with truthfulness and sincerity, with love and affection, I will not grieve nor oppress her and let her have food, clothing, and marital relations to the extent habitual among Jewish men.

There follows the declaration of the bride:

Sarwa heard the words of Hezekiah and agreed to marry him and to be his wife and companion in purity, holiness, and fear of God, to listen to his words, to honor and to hold him in esteem, to be his helper and to do in his house what a virtuous Jewish woman is expected to do, to conduct herself toward him with love and consideration, to be under his rule, and her desire will be toward him.

Although the concluding phrases are taken from the story of Adam and Eve in the second chapter of Genesis, there is no doubt that they were inserted in the Karaite document under the influence of the Muslim marriage contract which emphasized the superiority of the male partner with the words: "He is a rank higher," a reference to the Qur'ān 2:228: "men are one step higher than women," "*wa-lil-rijāl 'alayhinna daraja*". My quote is not from a Muslim lawbook, but from an actual document written in an Egyptian town in 1069.<sup>26</sup>

The idea of marriage as a companionship is likewise a biblical concept, as the Prophet Malachi has said (2:14): "She is your companion, the wife of your covenant." Some Palestinian Rabbanite documents, from both the pre-Islamic and early Islamic periods, speak even of a partnership.<sup>27</sup> Still I believe that the standard reference in Karaite contracts to good companionship and the promise of the husband not to mistreat his wife echoes the wording of the Islamic formulary. By chance, we have a Muslim marriage contract from the very same year 1028 (from Egypt, of course), which makes this statement: "He must fear God in

<sup>25</sup> ULC Add. 3430. For partial prior editions see Shaul Shaked, *A Tentative Bibliography of Geniza Documents* (Paris and The Hague, 1964), p. 41. For the full text see S. D. Goitein, *Palestinian Jewry in Early Islamic and Crusader Times* (Heb., in press); for a complete English translation, "Three Trousseaux of Jewish Brides from the Fatimid Period", *AJS Review*, Vol. II (Cambridge, Mass., 1977), pp. 77-110.

<sup>26</sup> For the phrase "he is a rank higher," as quoted in a Muslim marriage contract for the year 1069, see Adolf Grohmann, *Arabic Papyri in the Egyptian Library*, Vol. I (Cairo, 1934), p. 102, l. 12.

<sup>27</sup> Mordechai A. Friedman, "The Ethics of Medieval Jewish Marriage," *Religion in a Religious Age*, ed. S. D. Goitein (Cambridge, Mass., 1974), p. 85.



respect of her and render her good companionship, and, as God has ordained, do her no harm."<sup>28</sup>

The characteristic aspect of the Karaite marriage contract was its emphasis on sentiment and the reciprocity of attitudes; it went beyond sex, children, and mutual help as stated purposes of marriage, and gave prominence to the expression of love and affection, sincerity and esteem. Despite the biblical models for marital love, nothing specifically Karaite should be sought in this matter. The Karaite marriage contract was formulated later than the corresponding rabbinic and Islamic documents. It was created at a time when the medieval civilization of the Middle East had reached its zenith. It shows us what husband and wife in those days regarded as their legitimate right to expect in marriage, namely, the sublimation of sex through love. Let us not forget that the Arabs had a splendid heritage of secular poetry, largely expressing yearning for an absent one or the pain of separation—love, so to say, without sex. The pre-Islamic Arabs did not have to wait for Paul Valéry in order to discover that the real stuff of romance and romantic lyrics was unconsummated love. And poetry was read and recited everywhere. Only recently I found an eleventh century inventory of the estate of a coppersmith with innumerable items from his workshop and household, among them three books: a prayerbook, a book of Psalms, and a book of poetry in Arabic characters.<sup>29</sup> In November 1190, there was a public sale of the library of a Jewish physician which was so large that the auction took two weeks. The collection contained works of all descriptions, mainly, of course, medical books, such as at least thirty-three volumes by Galen, the Greek physician. But the very first title to be sold was the classic *Kitāb al-Aghānī*, "The Book of Songs," in six volumes.<sup>30</sup>

It is against this cultural background that the emphasis on the sentimental aspects of the life shared by husband and wife is to be understood. In the third volume of my book *A Mediterranean Society*, subtitled *The Family*, I have translated three letters addressed by husbands to their wives, the first a younger man, the second the father of a boy, the third a man married to a woman who had grown-up sons from a previous marriage. All letters speak of love; the third, as expected, is the most mature and intimate, but too long to be easily condensed. I summarize here the first. The husband's father-in-law was the judge of the Jewish community of al-Maḥalla, an important provincial town, who obviously intended to groom his son-in-law as his successor. But the young man wished to settle in the capital, which his wife refused to do. We understand why: in al-Maḥalla she was the queen, in Fustat she would have been a girl from the country. In the letter the scholarly husband reports that he gave a lecture to the members of the two rabbinic synagogues of Fustat, the Palestinian and the Iraqi, and that it was most successful, the only flaw being that she was not there

<sup>28</sup> Grohmann, *Arabic Papyri*, Vol. I, p. 98, l. 6.

<sup>29</sup> ENA 1822, f. 46a, ll. 17-18.

<sup>30</sup> TS NS 173, l. 5, ed. D. H. Baneth, *Tarbiz*, 30 (1961), 171-185. See *Med. Soc.*, II, 249.

to listen. He admonishes her in the strongest terms to follow him and continues: "I am confident that God the exalted will not forsake me, even when I am alone [this is a warning], far less when I am accompanied by a pious and valorous woman such as you. Therefore do not tarry, but come. A woman who has a husband whom she knows is religious and God-fearing and loves her is expected to assist him. I spare you by saying no more in this matter." But at the end of the letter, after having noted that an important person, probably a distant relative, had not come to the lecture and has otherwise shunned him, he concludes: "In short, there remains no one who loves me except you."<sup>31</sup>

I have collected a plethora of letters concerning one marriage that went awry. A relative and intimate friend of the future husband had arranged the match, but it was nevertheless a failure. The husband argued that his young wife was obstinate and arrogant, *waqiha*, she did not obey him, she failed to show reverence to his parents, and she neglected her hairdress, makeup, and bodily care (in other words, she did not beautify herself for him); she complained that she was exploited and mistreated. Finally, the unhappy matchmaker wrote a strong letter going so far as to express regret that he had not died before arranging this inauspicious union and demanded its termination. For, he writes, "living together without mutual consent and willingness is like prostitution," in Arabic *ṣuḥba bi-ghayr ḥiba [ya'nī: ḥibat khāṣir] ka'annahā zinā*.<sup>32</sup>

The story of the obstinate young wife who refused to accept her husband as her lord and lover is to be understood in the light of the general situation in which the teen-age girl found herself when entering the traditional Middle Eastern marriage. For the husband marriage did not involve a great change. He remained in his father's house. It was the wife who had to face a new environment, which comprised not only her husband but also the female members of his family, especially his sisters, who were potential enemies because of the strong affection often prevailing between brother and sister. She had to fight, she had to be strong, and this was what mothers had in mind for their daughters when they gave them names at birth. The Geniza has preserved the names of many hundreds of women, and the most surprising aspect of female onomastics is the idea of dominance and of overcoming expressed by many, if not most, of the names of women found in our documents. A few telling examples will suffice. *Sitt al-'Amā'im*, "she who rules over the turbans," meaning men; *Sitt al-Sāda*, "the lady of the lords." If she belonged to the class of the great merchants, for short she would be called *Tujjār*, which stands for *Sitt al-Tujjār*, "ruler over the merchants"; if she belonged to that of the *kātib*s, or government officials, *Kuttāb*; and if to the upper class in general, *Sitt al-Khāṣṣa*. Many a poor woman was called *Mulūk*, "Queen over the Kings." In his house, a husband should be like a king, Maimonides says in his law code. The mothers had similar wishes for their daughters. They should rule their houses.

<sup>31</sup> *Med. Soc.*, III, 218-220.

<sup>32</sup> ENA 2808, f. 36. *Med. Soc.*, III, 263.



In order to receive the undivided attention of their wives, husbands tried to seclude them from the world, that is, to prohibit them from leaving the house or from receiving guests except with their husband's permission, or they simply locked them in physically. This misguided exhibition of virility or, rather, machismo, did not find the support of the Jewish courts, and only partly that of Islamic law, but it was a strong trend in Muslim society, and had, as the Geniza shows, a considerable impact on the Jewish minority. Historians report with awe and hardly concealed admiration that al-Afdal, the great Fatimid viceroy, possessed eight hundred concubines, of whom fifty were his favorites. One day, when he noticed that one of the girls was looking out the window, he immediately had her beheaded, and, when her head was brought before him, he improvised verses the gist of which was: "I am not like the moon, who suffers stars around him."<sup>33</sup>

One example illustrates how the Jewish courts treated cases in which the husband's machismo threatened to destroy his marriage.

Things between Zāfira ["Zāfira means victorious"] and her husband had come to such an impasse that separation was imminent. Finally peace was restored after he had bound himself never to mention to her any obligation to stay at home. He promised not to prohibit her from going to any place that a respectable Jewish woman was supposed to visit, such as a synagogue, a public bath, parties of congratulation or condolence, or the marketplace for selling and buying linen. Nor would he forbid her to go to the house of her sister to see how she was and to pay her a visit, whenever she liked, nor would he forbid her sister to come to his house.<sup>34</sup>

When I first read this document, perhaps twenty years ago, I was happy to learn that Victoria had remained victorious. But when I visited the Institute of the Peoples of Asia in Leningrad in 1965, I found Zāfira's bill of repudiation. The settlement had not worked. Then I surmised that the real victor in this case was her sister, who obviously had taught her to stand up to her domineering husband.<sup>35</sup>

Meanwhile, however, another twelve years have passed and I have learned much about marital strife in Geniza times. Divorce was not necessarily a disaster for the wife; it often meant redemption. If I am not mistaken, the majority of the cases of divorce whose circumstances are known to me were initiated by the wife. In view of this, the term *ṭallaq*, to repudiate, is used also with reference to the female partner. Thus in one court record a husband accuses another man of

<sup>33</sup> See *Med. Soc.*, II, 349.

<sup>34</sup> TS 8 J 29, f. 13, written by the experienced court clerk Ḥalfōn ben Manasse (several hundred dated documents in his hand, complete or fragmentary, from the years 1100-1138 have been preserved).

<sup>35</sup> INA D 55-2, dated Jan. 26, 1145.

having said to his wife: "Repudiate him, *ṭallaqīh*, so that I may marry you." The wife, under oath, denied everything: "I should marry that one?!" *anā atzawwaj bi-dhāk*. The two men argued with each other before the court a long time, "partly in earnest and partly joking," in Arabic: *minhā jidd u-minhā hazl*. Finally the defendant promised to pay a fine of 50 dinars, probably a sum far beyond his means, should he ever try to marry the plaintiff's wife.<sup>36</sup>

Clearly, neither the triangle nor the threat of divorce was taken very seriously. Cases of proved adultery are known to me from the Geniza only with regard to Alexandria, a city notorious for its loose morals, and even there only under special circumstances soon to be explained. The way to resolve insurmountable complications in marriage was to terminate it. Divorce was extremely common in Egypt in Geniza times, even among the Copts, a most conservative Christian community. About 45 percent of the women whose histories I have been able to trace were married more than once. To be sure, there were widows among them. But documents dealing with divorce and bills of repudiation actually preserved are very numerous. It is not amiss to assume that failure to provide sexual satisfaction is to be regarded as a major cause for the frequency of divorces. A divorced woman, if she was otherwise an attractive match, had no difficulty in finding a new husband, even among the higher echelons of the society. Consequently, a woman with means, perhaps also good looks, incurred no great risk when she insisted on dissolving an intolerable alliance.<sup>37</sup>

Suspicious cast on married women with regard to premarital or extramarital relations are found occasionally in the Geniza, but, as a rule, such allegations were intended to do harm to the woman concerned, her family, or to another person involved, and, when brought to court, were either not substantiated or revoked. In the event of a public scandal the courts were forced to act. We possess a very detailed Karaite document on such an occurrence. A man had been visiting a married woman for years, sometimes as often as three or four times a day, making indecent overtures and using frivolous language. (The Arabic terms repeatedly mentioned are *mujūn*, *mudā'aba*, *mumāzaḥa*, and *alfāḥ fāḥisha*.) The matter had already come before the court once, and the man had undertaken to stop those visits, at least for a year. But the visits were resumed and, finally, an anonymous letter reached the court, obviously containing more substantial accusations, allegedly based on stories told to the writer by the woman herself. The woman and her husband were summoned to court. She declared that she had always feared that man; that when he visited her, she would invite her husband's aunt to come down to be present; that she had repeatedly complained to the

<sup>36</sup> A document composed of three fragments (and still not complete), ENA NS 19, f. 14, ENA Misc. 17, and ENA 4010, f. 7, see Mordechai A. Friedman, *Israel Oriental Studies*, Vol. VI (Tel Aviv, 1976), p. 291. In the hand of the court clerk Hillel b. Eli (dated documents: 1066-1108; he happened to be the father-in-law of Ḥalfōn, see n. 34, above).

<sup>37</sup> Details about divorce in *Med. Soc.*, III, 260-271.



Karaite authorities about him; and that she knew nothing about the writer of that anonymous letter. In corroboration, her husband, who happened to be a *labbān*, or distributor of milk (not necessarily a low occupation), declared that he knew only that his wife disapproved strongly of those visits, a reasonable claim since, according to Jewish law, a husband who suspects his wife is not permitted to live with her. When the culprit himself was summoned, the woman, as the court clerk laconically noted, qualified her statements in his presence and said only that she disapproved of his visits. Finally, a general assembly of the entire community was convened and a solemn excommunication was pronounced on anyone who knew something about the matter and did not come forward to testify in court. A day after the assembly, a Mr. Miller appeared and said he happened to enter the house of that woman and found her engaged with that visitor in licentious talk and joking and jesting, things that could lead to no good. At the end, however, several women of the community gave witness that she had been outraged by the overtures of the man, who tried to alienate her from her husband, and all of them testified that she was "free" of blame: *shahida kullun minhunna lahā bil-ḥurriyya*. That settled the matter. The court accepted their testimony.

The cases of verified adultery all concerned wives of India traders whose husbands had been away from home for more than a year. The time was the beginning of Saladin's rule over Egypt, in or around 1176. A young man writes from Alexandria to his brother, after the latter's return from India to Aden in South Arabia as follows: "Try to find the elder Abu 'l-Surūr and tell him that the new son of his brother Joseph, who was born after a gestation of fourteen months, sends him regards." Obviously, the two brothers, Abu 'l-Surūr and Joseph, were on a joint trip to India when this happened. After having written this, the writer, feeling compunction for making a joke about so serious a matter, adds: "May God repay her for what she has done." Human retribution seemingly was not expected.

Even more interesting is a postscript at the bottom of a letter concerning the wife of a maternal uncle, who, as had just been learned, had died in India. The passage deserves to be translated in full:

When my uncle departed, and we saw him off at the *Khalīj* [the canal connecting Alexandria with the Nile], he commended his wife to us telling us that she was expecting. We counted nine months, but she did not deliver a thing. We counted another nine months [what for, I do not quite understand] and finally she gave birth to a boy, *fa-qāmat qiyāmat al-nās kullhā ḥatta 'l-muslimīn*, there was a general uproar, even among the Muslims, and people said: we have never heard of such a thing as this Jewess has done, she ought to be burnt.

She was not. To the contrary, we read on in the letter about provisions made for her in the absence of her husband, whose death had not been communicated to

her.<sup>38</sup> No doubt she was a second wife, for her husband had been accompanied to India by a son, who, although still very young, had left a girl, *jāriya*, probably meaning slave girl, in Alexandria, who also took substantially more than nine months to produce a child. "If such things happen with *aḥrār*, respectable wives," says one letter, "what should be expected from *khawr*, loose women?"<sup>39</sup> The sexual mores of women normally are the same as those of their menfolk. We are here dealing with lower class people, as is also indicated by the horrid style and spelling of the letters from Alexandria, which are otherwise pleasant because of their warm, vernacular tone. We are also in a later period, when traditional discipline and decorum had vanished. All the cases of concubinage with a slave girl reported in the chapter on slavery in *A Mediterranean Society* (I, 134-135), are from Ayyubid times, and more can be added from the same period and even with regard to persons high up in Jewish society. For instance, a court physician, who left us extremely interesting letters, the son of a most prominent judge, kept a *jāriya*, which, naturally, was disapproved by his wife. In a letter written to him by his brother we read: "I was pleased to learn that peace has been restored between you and your wife; I hope it will last."<sup>40</sup>

How different was the world of the eleventh century, at least that of the learned and religious merchants, which provide the bulk of the Geniza correspondence. Those merchants were engaged in the Mediterranean trade, and were regularly absent from home for months, a year, or more. I do not recall in this vast corpus of writings a single reference or allusion to concubinage with a slave girl, or to a visit to a place of ill repute, let alone to the infidelity of a married woman.<sup>41</sup> I have often asked myself what these people did about sex, especially during those long periods of separation from their wives. Was friendship with persons of the same sex the answer? It is true friendship, formal friendship, was a strong socioeconomic power in the middle class society of those days. But in those circles of learned religious merchants it was not a relationship for the satisfaction of bodily desires.

<sup>38</sup> Gottheil-Worrell, pp. 44-57. A revised version of both the text and the translation is provided in my *India Book* (a collection of Geniza texts related to the India trade; in a progressed state of preparation), no. 174.

<sup>39</sup> TS Box G 1, 61v, ll. 2-3, *India Book*, no. 371.

<sup>40</sup> See A. L. Motzkin, "A Thirteenth-Century Jewish Physician in Jerusalem," *Muslim World*, 60 (1970), 344-349. Some details in this paper need qualification.

<sup>41</sup> I do not refer here to the India trade of the twelfth century, nor to two cases, one in the eleventh and one in the twelfth century, where a notable (it seems, falsely) was accused of having had a liaison with a woman of ill repute. In a letter written in or around 1039, ENA 3765, v. 10v, ll. 22-23, a dignitary from Iraq, appearing in Egypt, is credited with "having removed the slave girls from the houses," see Mark R. Cohen, *AJS Review*, 1 (1976), 12-13, 25. Thus, the local Jews of Egypt might have been in need of some reform at that time. About friendship see *Med. Soc.*, I, 164-169, and my "Formal Friendship in the Medieval Near East," *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society*, 115 (1971), 484-489.



Practicing abstinence while away from home should not appear so strange considering the socioeconomic and spiritual conditions in which those men found themselves. Life was hard; it was difficult to make a dirhem; travel was fraught with hardship and danger. The eating habits were unimaginably frugal, and where there is no Ceres there is no Venus. Furthermore, the rhythm of life was punctuated by the obligatory daily prayers, and for those educated merchants, by regular readings from the holy scriptures and the sacred law. In other words, the little time left free from business was constantly occupied by religious activities normally pursued in company. Finally, communal life and strife were very intensive and consumed much of the attention and energy of the middle class people, both at home and while on travel.

The Geniza presents a somewhat different picture of the less educated and poorer sections of the population. Jews followed the customs of the society at large. This may also have been true of those belonging to the uppermost crust. But they did not leave us their writings in the Geniza; they lived in Cairo, the residential city, and as a rule, wrote their letters in Arabic characters which did not find their way into storage.

The diffusion of a practice is best attested to by the endeavors of authorities to fight it. The Geniza has preserved the statutes of Dammūh, a Jewish holy shrine southwest of Fustat, known also from Muslim sources. The *ziyāra*, or visit, to it in springtime had the character of an outing rather than of a pilgrimage. Among the many things prohibited (for instance, playing chess), the attendance by unaccompanied boys, or by a man accompanied by a boy who was not a close relative is specifically noted.<sup>42</sup>

Even more telling is the story of an actual pilgrimage, this time to Jerusalem. Script, spelling and style betray the writer as a man of very little education. He starts out by assuring the recipient that there had never been more beautiful holidays than those experienced at that pilgrimage. On their way to the Holy City, the pilgrims, who traveled in groups, passed the Day of Atonement, a day of fasting and prayer, in Ramle, then the administrative capital of Palestine. During the service, a man from Tyre, Lebanon, and one from Tiberias, Palestine, became enamored of each other, *ta'ashshaqū*, and the one from Tiberias made overtures to the one from Tyre in full presence of the assembled, *fat-walla' aṭ-ṭabarānī bihi quddām al-nās*. A fistfight between the pilgrims from Tyre and Tiberias ensued, whereupon a local notable called in the police, who remained in the synagogue until the termination of the service. The writer does not censure the lovers or the fistfight, but he is enraged at the notable, who desecrated the synagogue by summoning the police.<sup>43</sup>

The Geniza has provided us with a Hebrew *maqāma*, which recalls the story of the Qur'ān teacher in the novel of Rachid Boujedra mentioned earlier. This

<sup>42</sup> TS 20.117, ed. Assaf, *Texts*, p. 161.

<sup>43</sup> TS 8 J 22, f. 25, ed. S. D. Goitein, *Shalem*, Vol. II (Jerusalem, 1976), pp. 90-92.

particular *maqāma* is so extremely sarcastic that I assume it to be an imitation of an Arabic original, and I shall be grateful to my learned colleagues for helping me to find it. A cantor, that is, the man in charge of those parts of the synagogue service which are sung, became enamored of a boy.<sup>44</sup> In order to win his favors, he sold all the learned books he possessed and gave the money to the boy, but the latter did not return his favors. Then, one by one, the love-mad cantor sold the weekly lections of the Five Books of Moses—there are fifty-two of them reminiscent of the sixty *hizb*, or parts, of the Qur'ān. Finally, he even disposed of his prayer mantle, but the boy did not budge. In the face of this calamity, the cantor filed suit against him before the rabbinical court and the elders of the community: "I have made a deal with this boy, I have done my part, I have given him all I have; but he has not fulfilled his obligation; please let me have the well-deserved satisfaction." The comedy ends with the discovery that the cantor was not really a Jew, but a sham convert who had come from far off in the West, where he had been notorious for similar escapades. I am not quite sure that this unexpected end formed a part of the original story.<sup>45</sup>

It seems, however, that a section of the Jewish intelligentsia, especially in Spain, had accepted the cult of the ephebes, or beautiful boys, as an essential ingredient of the high civilization to which they then belonged. There exist medieval Hebrew poems, some found also in the Geniza, which are dedicated to this topic.<sup>46</sup> It has always been contended that those poems were literary exercises composed to prove that the Hebrew language was able to express everything. This assumption no doubt is partly true, but as Professor J. Schirmann, the greatest living authority on secular medieval Hebrew poetry, has shown, it is not the whole truth.<sup>47</sup> I wish to illustrate this by two strophes of a tenth century Hebrew poem—also from the Geniza—written in southern Italy, a region exposed at that time to both Islamic and Byzantine influences:

Behold, ships, behold, ships coming into the port.  
Go and see what merchandise they bring.  
Beautiful girls.  
Go and see what they were sold for.  
For a barrel of straw.  
Ah, captain, you have been paid too much.

Behold, ships, behold ships, coming into the port.  
Go and see what merchandise they bring.

<sup>44</sup> About cantors as being suspected of somewhat light mores see *Med. Soc.*, II, 222-223.

<sup>45</sup> TS Loan 170, ed. Israel Davidson, *Genizah Studies*, Vol. III (New York, 1928), pp. 218-223. Corrections by S. M. Stern, *Tarbiz*, 19 (1948), 62-63.

<sup>46</sup> See J. Schirmann, *New Hebrew Poems from the Genizah* (Jerusalem, 1965), pp. 157-158, and 281.

<sup>47</sup> "The Ephebe in Medieval Hebrew Poetry," *Sefarad*, 15 (1955), 55-68.



Handsome boys, finer than gold.  
 Go and see what they were sold for.  
 For a barrel of gold and gems.  
 Ah, captain, you have been paid too little.<sup>48</sup>

I must leave it to your imagination to “divine” for which type of audience such verses might have been intended.

Naturally, we have nothing corresponding either in letters or in documents evidencing similar practices on the female side. But there is indirect testimony on the matter in Moses Maimonides’ Code of Jewish law, which was written during the early years of Ayyubid rule over Egypt. Lesbian practices are repeatedly referred to in the Talmud; Maimonides, while disapproving of them, states that no formal punishment for those transgressions was foreseen by the law, but women known for such indulgence should not be admitted to one’s house, nor should the female members of a man’s own household be allowed to visit them.<sup>49</sup>

Extramarital relations of women widowed or divorced seem to have been looked upon with a certain degree of condonation. Cohabitation with an unmarried woman was under all circumstances improper, but it was not a sin. In choosing a mate, physical attraction no doubt played a greater role in a second marriage than in a first, and since for economic reasons unmarried women often had opportunity to meet men, occasions for amorous affairs were not lacking.

I conclude this paper with the story of a liaison that also demonstrates that different people were inclined to look upon extramarital relations in different ways. A rich divorcée, called Wuḥsha, “Object of Desire,” like the French name *Désirée*, befriended a refugee from Ascalon, Palestine—it was during the Crusades. Wuḥsha became pregnant, and, when she attended the synagogue of the Iraqians in Fustat on the Day of Atonement, the President expelled her. This was contrary to the law, or, at least, its spirit, for on that day of reconciliation with one’s fellowmen and with God even excommunicated persons were admitted to the service. But the President obviously wished to demonstrate that even a rich woman should not be tolerated to flout public mores. Wuḥsha took exquisite revenge. She made a grand will containing bequests to various charities, and the Synagogue of the Iraqians from which she had been expelled received exactly the same sum as all the other synagogues benefiting from her munificence. Obviously she wished to show that she did not care about the expulsion from that particular place of worship. What *did* concern her was the legitimacy of the child to whom

<sup>48</sup> TS NS Box 200, f. 55, ed. Zvi Malachi, *Israel Oriental Studies*, Vol. II (Tel Aviv, 1972), pp. 288-289.

<sup>49</sup> PT Gittin 8:10, f. 49c, bottom; BT Shabbat 65a, and parallels. Maimonides, Code, Book “Holiness,” Section “Forbidden Relations,” chap. 21, para. 8. R. Nissim of Qayrawān, Tunisia, one of the greatest rabbinical authorities of the eleventh century, dedicated an extensive responsum to this question. See S. Abramson, *R. Nissim Gaon* (Jerusalem, 1965), p. 273.

she would give birth. About this we have a highly interesting document written many years after her death when the son whom she had borne had to clarify his personal status, no doubt because he wished to marry.

The document consists of two parts. In the first part a witness reports that one day, while he was sitting in his apartment with the learned and highly respected cantor and court clerk Hillel ben Eli, Wuḥsha, who lived on the third floor of the same house, came down and said: "I wonder whether you could help me. I have become involved with that Mr. Ḥassūn from Ascalon and am expecting. I am afraid that he will deny his fatherhood." The court clerk said: "Gather some people and let them surprise him with you." In the second part of the document, three respectable persons testify that one day, when they happened to be on the ground floor of that building, Wuḥsha appeared and said to them: "Could you not come up to my place. I need you for something." The three went up with her and found Ḥassūn sitting in her apartment. There were wine and perfumes...and there the manuscript breaks off. I assume no continuation is needed. The intrinsic value of such a document is its social setting. The five gentlemen present at Wuḥsha's appearances did not get excited about what they heard. They did not censure her nor did they make inquiries, and the three invited to go up to her room were not hesitant to do so. One understood that such things happen and one tried to be helpful.<sup>50</sup>

Our survey has shown that the "common people," as revealed to us in the Geniza papers were not of one mold. The various layers of the society differed in their sexual mores, and these very mores were changing over the course of time. All in all, however, I must concede that my general ideas about those medieval people have changed somewhat after I committed the indiscretion of reading their letters.

<sup>50</sup> The story of Wuḥsha is told in detail in *Med. Soc.*, III, 346-352, in the section "The Independent Woman."





# REGULATION OF SEXUAL BEHAVIOR UNDER TRADITIONAL ISLAMIC LAW

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To begin on a comparative note, one should not expect any particular expertise or wide experience of sexual behavior on the part of a professional English lawyer, simply because the vast majority of sexual encounters are not the province of the law in England.

In common with most Western legal systems, English law does not concern itself with sexual relations between consenting adults in private. Should any one of these three criteria—free consent, maturity, and privacy—be lacking, then certainly there may arise a wide range of criminal offenses, such as rape, unlawful carnal knowledge, obscenity, and indecency. But without these aggravating factors the basic philosophy of English and Western law generally is that sexual behavior is a matter of private morality and for the individual conscience. It attracts no criminal sanction and a civil one only insofar as adultery may constitute a matrimonial offense giving the injured spouse grounds for dissolution of marriage.

Islamic, or Shari'a, law concerning sexual behavior is based upon an entirely different, almost diametrically opposite, approach. Here, as so often in the Shari'a, there is no distinction between law and morality. According to the medieval Arabic legal manuals which are the repository of traditional Shari'a doctrine, a sexual relationship is permissible and legal only when there exists a recognized legal basis for it: otherwise that relationship is a criminal offense. Two such bases only are recognized. The first is the marital tie between husband and wife, and the second is the right of ownership that a master possesses over his female slave concubine. Since the latter ground has for long had no legal significance, it may be asserted as the fundamental principle of Shari'a law that *any* extramarital sexual relations are illegal and entail criminal sanctions.

In general terms Islamic criminal law is a two-tier system. The top tier consists of certain defined offenses entailing fixed punishments and known as *hadd* offenses. The lower tier consists of all other offenses, which can broadly be categorized as less serious versions of the respective *hadd* offenses. This is the area known as *ta'zir* ("deterrent") jurisdiction where the determination, both of the offense and of the punishment therefore, is a matter for the discretion of the authorities, executive and judicial.



The laws regulating sexual behavior are an integral part of this scheme. Any extramarital sexual intercourse, by persons married or unmarried, constitutes the ḥadd offense of *zinā*. It is punishable, in the case of unmarried offenders, by one hundred lashes, and in the case of married offenders,<sup>1</sup> by stoning to death. Any other lesser sexual offense, such as indecent behavior, is regulated by the discretionary system of *ta'zīr*.

To commit a ḥadd offense is literally to step outside the "limits" laid down by the lawgiver Allah himself. The offense of *zinā* is defined in the Koran; and so grave is the offense in the eyes of Sharī'a law that to accuse someone of it without being able to prove that accusation true constitutes the most serious form of defamation known to the law. An unproved imputation of *zinā* is itself the ḥadd offense of *qadhf* (criminal defamation), punishable by eighty lashes.<sup>2</sup>

Both of these basic attitudes toward the regulation of sexual behavior under the law—the secular Western and the religious Islamic—have been present during this century in one particular Muslim country, where the last few years have witnessed a unique and dramatic swing toward a reassertion of traditional Islamic law. The country to which I refer is Libya.

During the latter years of the nineteenth and the early years of the twentieth centuries, most Muslim countries of the Near and Middle East had, under the influence of the West, abandoned the Sharī'a criminal law and adopted in its place codes of criminal law drawn from European, secular sources. In the case of Libya the dominant influence came from Italy, and the Libyan Penal Code, accordingly, reflected the sexual mores of Latin European society. Under this Code, therefore, sexual relations outside marriage were not a criminal offense unless there was some aggravating factor such as the minority of one of the parties, lack of consent, or public indecency. Adultery was an offense, but solely of concern to the offended spouse, who had discretionary control over its prosecution and punishment.

In 1973, however, the ḥadd offense of *zinā* was restored and the provisions of the Libyan Penal Code relating to sexual offenses were modified accordingly.<sup>3</sup> Consequently any extramarital sexual act is now in Libya a crime against morality that may be prosecuted and punished, irrespective of whether there are any aggravating factors present or not, and irrespective of the wishes of any offended spouse.

There is, however, one striking difference from the traditional Sharī'a law of

<sup>1</sup> This category of offender is known in Arabic as *muhṣin*—i.e., one who has been "elevated" by the marital status. Infringement of the laws governing sexual behavior is deemed more heinous on the part of those who have contracted into the matrimonial system than on the part of those who have not.

<sup>2</sup> Professor Rosenthal remarked in his paper (elsewhere in this volume) upon the six pleasures known to Islamic philosophy. Six is also the number of ḥadd offenses known to the law, the other four being theft, highway robbery, wine-drinking, and apostasy.

<sup>3</sup> Law number 70 of October 2, 1973.

zinā. The one penalty prescribed by the Libyan Law is that of one hundred lashes with a possible discretionary term of imprisonment in addition. The ultimate penalty of death by lapidation for married offenders has been dropped. This may be due not only to a natural aversion to the brutality of this penalty in the eyes of present-day society, but also to the fact that the penalty is not indeed prescribed in the divine revelation of the Koran and the sunna itself but became part of the traditional law through early juristic opinion and ultimately the consensus of the authoritative scholars. Colonel Qadhafy is known to have expressed his view that the opinions of legal scholars, however widespread, can in no way have the same binding force as the texts of the divine revelation. It may well be, therefore, that the Libyan Law was founded upon such a purist approach to the question of the sources of Islamic law.<sup>4</sup>

I return now to the traditional Shari'a law, as formulated in the authoritative classical legal manuals, to consider briefly the question of proof of the offense of zinā.

In general terms Shari'a doctrine formulates a very strict and rigid system of legal proof. Circumstantial evidence, however compelling, is not generally admissible and a criminal offense can be established, apart from the confession of the accused, only by the oral testimony of witnesses for the prosecution.

In the case of most criminal offenses two witnesses suffice. But the burden resting upon the prosecution in a case of zinā is doubly severe. Four witnesses must testify orally. They must be male, adult Muslims. They must be thoroughly trustworthy—not merely in the sense that they must have no criminal record: scrutiny must show them to be men of unblemished integrity of character. Finally, they must testify to nothing less than their own individual clear eyewitness of the carnal act itself. The circumstances of a couple convicted upon such evidence must surely constitute the most graphic definition possible of the Latin maxim: "apprehended *in flagrante delicto*."

The obvious question arises as to why the law requires so rigorous a standard of proof as makes the practical possibility of conviction and punishment for zinā extremely remote—except, that is, upon the offender's own sustained confession, which must be fourfold (parallel with the requirement of four witnesses) and may be retracted at any time prior to the actual imposition of the penalty.

One eminent French scholar and orientalist<sup>5</sup> appears to be of the view that the law here is a paper tiger, without any real muscle. He suggests that the law was not in fact designed to bring offenders to justice, but, quite the contrary, to

<sup>4</sup> For these details of Libyan law I am indebted to Ann Mayer, a graduate of the University of Pennsylvania currently working at the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, whose essay "Legislation in Defense of Arabo-Islamic sexual Mores: Post-Revolutionary Libyan Laws on Artificial Insemination, Zinā, and Qadhf," will be published in a forthcoming issue of the *American Journal of Comparative Law*.

<sup>5</sup> G. H. Bousquet, *L'Ethique sexuelle de l'Islam* (Paris, 1966), p. 67.



discourage and prevent the revelation or publication, through conviction in the courts, of any infringement of the code of sexual morality. In other words, though the law may have been broken, it should on no account be seen to have been broken.

But from an objective point of view, such an argument, which at least queries the bona fides of the Muslim jurists, may seem somewhat facile and cynical; while from the standpoint of Muslim scholarship itself it can have no appeal whatsoever, since the requirement of four witnesses is spelled out, in explicit and unequivocal terms, in the text of the Koran.<sup>6</sup>

As elaborated by Muslim jurisprudence, the laws of evidence certainly do make proof of zinā by prosecution witnesses well-nigh impossible. But at the same time there is no hesitation about applying the punishment to offenders who confess their guilt. Nor is there any apparent reluctance to publicize, by conviction and punishment, unlawful sexual behavior not amounting to proven zinā: for here the principle of ta'zīr jurisdiction applies and the standard of proof required is not four witnesses but lies at the discretion of the court.

It seems to me that there is a simple and straightforward explanation for the "four witnesses" rule. A central and consistent principle governing criminal liability for the ḥadd punishments is that such punishment should not be applied where there is the slightest shadow of doubt as to the guilt of the accused. The proof required for zinā simply carries this principle to the ultimate degree. The burden of proof to establish the offense of zinā is of the utmost rigor simply because the offense is of the utmost seriousness in the eyes of the law. To my mind, therefore, the real question is why the offense is considered such a uniquely serious one. And the answer to this question lies, I believe, in the basic philosophy of Islamic family law.

There is little doubt about the radical nature of the reforms introduced by Islam in regard to the husband-wife relationship which had generally prevailed, certainly among the nomadic tribes, in pre-Islamic customary Arabian law.

According to the traditionally accepted picture of this tribal law, women occupied the position of childbearing chattels, generally deprived of proprietary or other rights and sold into a loose sexual liaison with their husbands for a price which was paid to the wife's father or other close male relatives.

In sharp contrast, a central and consistent theme of the divine revelation of the Koran and the sunna—the twin primary sources of Sharī'a law—is the enhancement of the status of woman in terms of her rights and obligations as a wife and the mother of a family.

The fundamental purpose of the law accordingly now becomes the elevation of the marital status and its consolidation as the foundation stone of the Muslim family. As opposed to the position under pre-Islamic law, the contract of marriage is now a more balanced and truly bilateral contract between the husband and the

<sup>6</sup> Suras 4:15 and 24:4, 5.

wife. It is built upon the basis of the husband's exclusive right to sexual union with his wife in consideration of his providing an appropriate dower payable to the wife and to her alone. From this stems a systematic system of marital rights and duties. Throughout marital life in the family home the husband is obliged to provide proper maintenance and support to the wife in return for his right to control her activities and the family affairs in general, and there are entrenched and inviolable mutual rights of inheritance between the spouses. The Islamic concept of marriage is that of the union of a husband and wife to the exclusion of all others, even if the husband, under the accepted institution of polygamy, may enjoy, or alternatively bear the burden of, four such unions concurrently.

So consolidated by Shari'a doctrine, the contractual tie of marriage becomes the bedrock of the whole structure of family law in the following way.

The legal postulate for admission into the family group is legitimacy of lineage, or *nasab*. Before Islam Arab society had customarily placed a very dominant emphasis on *nasab*, or "roots" in the current Western vernacular. But the pre-Islamic notion of *nasab* was linked almost exclusively to the father, the female connection counting for little or nothing in the agnatic tribe. Under Islam, however, the sole basis of *nasab*, or legitimacy, is the conception of the child during the marriage of the mother and the father. In other words the mother has now become, through the emphasis placed on the marital tie, a vital link in the creation of *nasab*. The maternal connection is as important as the paternal connection. *Nasab* in this sense is crucial to the whole complex web of rights and duties that make up a vital part of family law. The blood tie deriving from legitimate paternity is paramount and exclusive, because the law does not recognize any form of adoptive paternity. Upon *nasab* depend such things as rights of care, custody, and guardianship, rights and duties of maintenance and support, responsibility for the tortuous actions of others or help in bearing the burden of one's own liability, and, of course, rights of inheritance upon succession at death. The presence or absence of *nasab* is thus the difference between being included within the protection of the law or being excluded from it. Those without *nasab* are, in the realm of family law at least, outlaws in a genuine sense of the term.<sup>7</sup>

Seen in the context of the need to safeguard this fundamental reform of the

<sup>7</sup> This rigidly positive principle of legitimate paternity is counterbalanced by certain "compassionate" aspects of the law, the cumulative effect of which is to reduce the likelihood of children suffering the stigma of illegitimacy. The presumption that a child born to a married woman is the legitimate child of her husband is rebuttable only by the procedure of *li'ân* (a series of religious oaths taken by the alleged father to disown the child, which is an awesome undertaking in the traditional Muslim milieu); and this presumption continues for long periods (two years in Ḥanafī, and five years in Mālikī, law) after the dissolution of the marriage by death or divorce. The procedure of *iqrār* (acknowledgment of paternity) may also in effect be the legitimization of a child not conceived during wedlock, since the laws of evidence make it unlikely that such an acknowledgment may be effectively challenged.



basis of family law introduced by Islam, the significance of the sanctions imposed upon extramarital relations may be readily apparent.

The issue of zinā, and only the issue of zinā, are illegitimate. They have no nasab and are outlaws. Sexual relations outside marriage, therefore, in the contemplation of Muslim jurisprudence can lead to only one result. They will create outlaws, or at least distort and confuse the lines of nasab. Hence they pose the greatest threat to the family law because they undermine its very foundation.

From this broad, and I believe correct, perspective, zinā properly appears as the gravest of offenses which merits the gravest of punishment. The laws governing sexual behavior are the protective wall which buttresses and safeguards the whole fabric of Sharī'a matrimonial and family law.

# SHI'I ATTITUDES TOWARD WOMEN AS REFLECTED IN FIQH

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Shi'i religious law in general differs little from Sunni law. It deals with the same range of subject matter, and its solutions to specific questions agree in most cases with those of one or more of the Sunni legal schools. Even in instances where the four schools to which Sunni law was eventually confined unanimously opposed the position adopted in Shi'i law, this position is sometimes known to have been supported by some early Sunni scholars. There are, to be sure, a few matters, especially in the field of the ritual or *'ibādāt*, which became distinguishing features of Shi'i versus Sunni law. Most conspicuous for the Muslim community was the difference in the *adhān*, the call to prayer. The Shi'i call to prayer included the *ḥai'ala*, that is, the formula "Come to the best of work" which Muḥammad al-Bāqir, fifth Imam of the Twelver Shi'a, is reported to have accused the Caliph 'Umar of abolishing with the argument that it might keep the people from joining the jihad.<sup>1</sup> Another point of dispute between Sunnis and Shi'is concerned the *mash' alā 'l-khuffain*, the substitute wiping of shoes instead of the washing of feet in the ritual ablution. Shi'i law completely prohibited the substitute practice. Early Sunni opinion did not unreservedly favor it; but as it became a distinctive point of difference, recognition of its legitimacy could even be mentioned in Sunni creeds as an article of faith whose rejection implied unbelief.<sup>2</sup> These two examples illustrate well the triviality of most of the differences between Shi'i and Sunni law as far as the subject matter is concerned. They could be raised to the level of

<sup>1</sup> Al-Nu'mān, *Da'ā'im al-Islām*, ed. A. A. A. Fyzee (2 vols.; Cairo, 1370-1379/1951-1960) (hereafter cited as *Da'ā'im*), I, 172 f.; R. Strothmann, *Kultus der Zaiditen* (Strassburg, 1912), pp. 50 f.

<sup>2</sup> See Strothmann, *Kultus der Zaiditen*, pp. 21-26; A. J. Wensinck, *The Muslim Creed* (Cambridge, 1932), pp. 129, 158-160, 192, 219. The Shi'i repudiation of the *mash' alā 'l-khuffain* tended to be similarly emphatic. Imam Ja'far aṣ-Ṣādiq is quoted as having mentioned it as one of three matters in which he would never observe precautionary dissimulation (*taqiyya*). See *Da'ā'im*, I, 133; al-Kulaynī, *al-Kāfī*, ed. 'Alī Akbar al-Ghaffārī (8 vols.; Tehran, 1381/1961) (hereafter cited as *al-Kāfī*), III, 32. Just as Sunni scholars forbade praying behind an imam who rejected the *mash' alā 'l-khuffain* (Strothmann, *Kultus*, pp. 25 f.), Shi'is forbade praying behind an imam who considered it licit (*Da'ā'im*, I, 133).



matters of faith only because of the underlying social antagonism between the Shi'i and Sunni communities. Obviously, they do not invalidate our judgment that positive Shi'i law generally does not differ more substantially from Sunni law than the laws of the Sunni schools differ among themselves.

The far-reaching agreement of Shi'i and Sunni law must appear surprising in view of the major conflict of opinion between Shi'is and Sunnis in regard to the sources of the law (*uṣūl al-fiqh*). Of the four sources recognized by Sunni law, the Shi'is accepted only the first, the Koran, wherein the legal texts are quite limited in scope. In respect to the second source, the Sunna, the Shi'is repudiated the Sunni collections of legal traditions and relied on their own, consisting mostly of statements of the Shi'i Imams rather than hadiths traced back to the Prophet. The principle of consensus (*ijmā'*), the third source, was generally confined by both factions to their own community. The fourth source, analogy (*qiyās*), was totally rejected at least by the Twelver and Isma'ili Shi'a.<sup>3</sup> With this divergence of opinion concerning the "sources of the law," what was the basis for the remarkable similarity of Shi'i and Sunni positive law? Joseph Schacht, to whom we owe the fundamental study of the origins of Islamic jurisprudence, held that the legal doctrine was first developed in the early Sunni schools and later was adopted, with minor modifications, by the Shi'is and Kharijis.<sup>4</sup> It is argued here that the origins of sectarian legal schools were rather contemporaneous with the Sunni ones and that the similarity of their legal systems rests on the fact that all of them faced the same reality that Schacht defined as the starting point of Islamic jurisprudence: the late Umayyad practice consisting essentially of customary law and practice influenced by the Koranic legal prescriptions and caliphal regulations. It must be remembered that the Shi'a and the Khawarij had developed into definite identity groups well before the rise of the legal schools. Once the law came to be systematically questioned and examined, it was only natural for Shi'is and Kharijis to turn to their own religious leaders for guidance rather than to follow the Sunni schools. Moreover, the evidence of the sources, contrary to what Schacht believed, tends to confirm that the beginnings of the systematization of the law go back to the time of the rise of the Sunni schools. With regard to the Shi'a, a distinct legal doctrine was first formulated by Muḥammad al-Bāqir and

<sup>3</sup> For the early Imami doctrine on *uṣūl al-fiqh* see in particular R. Brunschvig, "Les *Usul al-Fiqh* Imāmites à leur Stade Ancien (Xe et XIe siècles)," in *Le Shi'isme Imāmīte*, ed. T. Fahd (Paris, 1970), pp. 201-212. The Isma'ilis did not develop a systematic doctrine of their own. Their objections to the Sunni principles of *uṣūl al-fiqh*, which parallel the Imami objections, are expressed in Qāḍī an-Nu'mān's *Ikhtilāf uṣūl al-madhāhib*, ed. S. T. Lokhandwalla (Simla, 1972). The Zaidis generally accepted the principle of *qiyās* (see Strothmann, *Kultus*, pp. 16 f.). Zaidi *uṣūl al-fiqh* as elaborated by the Caspian Zaidi Imams were dependent on Mu'tazilī doctrine. The Zaidis generally insisted, however, on the validity of the consensus of the descendants of the Prophet (*ijmā' al-'itra*) against Sunni and Mu'tazilī doctrine.

<sup>4</sup> J. Schacht, *The Origins of Muhammadan Jurisprudence* (2d ed.; Oxford, 1953), pp. 260-268.

elaborated by his son Ja'far aṣ-Ṣādiq, the fifth and sixth Imams of the Twelvers, to whom the bulk of their legal traditions is attributed.<sup>5</sup> Muḥammad al-Bāqir, who died ca. 117/735, was a contemporary of the Kufan legal scholar Ibrāhīm al-Nakha'i and the Medinese al-Zuhri. The lifetime of Ja'far aṣ-Ṣādiq, who was born ca. 80/700 and died in 148/765, coincided almost exactly with that of Abū Ḥanīfa (80/699-150/767), the founder of the Ḥanafī school of Kufa, while Mālik b. Anas (ca. 97/765-179/795), the founder of the Mālikī school of Medina, was somewhat younger than he.

In view of the predominant similarity of Shi'i and Sunni positive law, it is remarkable that the few major points in which the two differ substantially relate, in one way or another, to the rights of women in marriage and inheritance. The following three points have repeatedly been singled out as involving the largest deviation of Twelver Shi'i or Imami from Sunni law: (1) the temporary marriage or *mut'a*; (2) the strict regulation of the discretionary repudiation of the wife (*ḡalāq*) which greatly restricts the abuse of this institution; and (3) the abolition of the privileged position which the Sunni law of inheritance accords the agnates in favor of a roughly equal treatment of relatives related through male and female links.<sup>6</sup> These deviations of Imami law have had considerable effect on differentiating Shi'i and Sunni society.<sup>7</sup> It is not intended here to examine these effects in detail. Rather, the question addressed is how far these dissimilarities of the law reflect a different concept of the status of women in Shi'ism and Sunnism. With this aim they are first traced to their origins, and their motivation in the genesis of Imami law is established. Then the treatment of these matters in the other Shi'i legal systems known to us, those of the Zaidis and Isma'ilis, are considered on a comparative basis.

The history of the institution of *mut'a*, a marriage contracted for a fixed term,

<sup>5</sup> The legal views of Imams al-Bāqir and aṣ-Ṣādiq were collected by their disciples in written works commonly known as *uṣūl*. These are listed by Ibn al-Nadīm as well as by the Imami bibliographers like al-Ṭūsī and an-Najāshī and were still available to these authors. Thus there was a literary tradition of Imami *fiqh* going back to these Imams. The *uṣūl* were the ultimate sources of the later extant collections of Imami traditions like al-Kulaynī's *al-Kāfi*. There is no good reason to consider the origins of the Shi'i literature before the end of the third century A. H. as apocryphal as did Schacht (*Origins*, p. 268). Nor is there reason to suspect that Imami legal doctrine changed substantially after the period of the early *uṣūl*. The Sharīf al-Murtaḍā writing in the first half of the fifth/eleventh century could still recommend to Imami communities lacking a qualified legal expert to rely on the book of a disciple of Imam Ja'far, 'Ubayd Allāh al-Ḥalabī (see W. Madelung, "The Sources of Ismā'īlī Law," *Journal of Near Eastern Studies*, XXXV (1976), 34). Among the Ibāḍīs, *fiqh* questions were systematically discussed in the circle of Abū 'Ubayda Muslim b. Abī Karīma who died during the caliphate of al-Manṣūr (136-158/ 753-775). His doctrine as transmitted and elaborated by seven of his disciples was collected by Abū Ghānim Bishr b. Ghānim al-Khurāsānī in his *al-Mudawwana* (see Abū Ghānim al-Khurāsānī, *al-Mudawwana al-kubrā* [Beirut, 1394/1974]).

<sup>6</sup> See in general N. J. Coulson, *A History of Islamic Law* (Edinburgh, 1964), 109-119; Y. Linant de Bellefonds, "Le Droit Imāmīte," in *Le Shī'isme Imāmīte*, pp. 192 ff.

<sup>7</sup> See Linant de Bellefonds, "Le Droit Imāmīte."



has been repeatedly studied.<sup>8</sup> It was probably a pre-Islamic Arab custom and was practiced in the early Muslim community under the Prophet. Indeed, Koran, Sura 4:24, of the official 'Uthmanic recension referred to, and regulated, it as is confirmed by the fuller version of the sura contained in the codices of Ibn Mas'ūd, Ubay b. Ka'b, and Ibn al-'Abbās.<sup>9</sup> Although the Prophet is reported by some traditions to have eventually prohibited it, it was evidently considered legitimate by some of his Companions even after his death. According to a well-known tradition reported by the Medinese authority al-Zuhri, it was the second Caliph 'Umar who sharply denounced it as a form of prostitution and prohibited it. The institution has obviously mostly been detrimental to women and unfavorable to their legal status. Its acceptance in Imami law was based on statements attributed to Imams al-Bāqir and aṣ-Ṣādiq which expressly reject 'Umar's prohibition as an arbitrary change of the divine law and the practice of the Prophet which still prevailed under the first Caliph Abū Bakr.<sup>10</sup>

It is to be noted, however, that the *mut'a* was considered an inferior kind of marriage in Imami law. The status of the woman in a *mut'a* marriage is similar to that of a slave concubine rather than to that of a legal wife. Thus, she is not counted among the four wives the husband can legally marry. She is not normally entitled to inherit from the husband but is paid a stipulated recompense. Her waiting period (*'idda*) before remarriage is shortened like that of a slave woman.<sup>11</sup> In view of this inferior status, Imam Ja'far is quoted to have stated that it is blameworthy (*makrūh*) to contract a temporary marriage with a virgin because of the wrong it does to her family.<sup>12</sup> Imam Mūsā al-Kāẓim, on the other hand, stated that the temporary marriage is licit only for an unmarried man who cannot dispense with it in order to preserve his modesty or for a married man while he is absent from his wife.<sup>13</sup> This depreciatory attitude toward the *mut'a* is further illustrated by an anecdote quoted by al-Kulaynī about an encounter between the early Imami scholar Abū Ja'far Ṣāhib al-Ṭāq and Abū Ḥanīfa. In ironic vein, the latter asked Abū Ja'far what prevented him from ordering his women to contract temporary marriages and thus make a profit for himself. Abū Ja'far answered that not all licit occupations are desirable and, in turn, asked Abū Ḥanīfa what prevented him from having his women employed in taverns serving date wine for a profit since he considered the drinking of date wine licit.<sup>14</sup> Thus it is evident that the legitimization of the *mut'a* in Imami law was not based on a difference of

<sup>8</sup> W. Heffening, art. "Mut'a," in *E.I.*, 1st ed.; Schacht, *Origins*, pp. 266 f.

<sup>9</sup> This version of the sura is quoted in a statement of Imam Ja'far, *al-Kāfi*, V, 449.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 451 f., 458.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 462.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 452 f.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 450. These reports show that the statement quoted by Heffening (art. "Mut'a" in *E.I.*) from a late Imami source to the effect that the believer is perfect only when he has experienced a *mut'a* does not reflect the spirit of Imami law.

difference of attitude toward women between Shi'is and Sunnis or on a preference for the institution. Rather it was motivated by the desire to restore the divinely sanctioned practice of the Prophet which 'Umar was accused of having arbitrarily changed. The accusation of the second Caliph in particular as the corrupter of the divine law indeed recurs in quite a few instances in Imami law as has already been illustrated by the case of the call to prayer.

In regard to the unilateral repudiation of the wife (*ṭalāq*), Imami law is considerably more restrictive than the law of any of the Sunni schools. *Ṭalāq* appears to have been practiced in pre-Islamic Arabia with virtually no restrictions. The Koran sanctioned and regulated it in relative detail. From the beginning Sunni law distinguished two forms of repudiation, the regular and approved form (*ṭalāq as-sunna*) and the irregular and reprehensible form (*ṭalāq al-bid'a*). The former consists of a single declaration of repudiation at a time of purity (*ṭuhr*) of the wife, that is, only between menstrual periods and without intercourse having taken place during the particular period of purity. In the reprehensible form the rules of purity are disregarded and the repudiation may be made irrevocable by a threefold declaration which renders impossible both a resumption of the marriage before the end of the legal waiting and a remarriage of the couple before an intervening marriage of the wife. In the law of the Sunni schools the *ṭalāq al-bid'a*, though morally condemned, is nevertheless legally as effective as the *ṭalāq as-sunna*. The reason for this ambiguous attitude of the founders of the Sunni law schools was evidently that they found the permissive *ṭalāq al-bid'a* rather than the restrictive *ṭalāq as-sunna* to be the standard and accepted practice, as it generally remained in later centuries despite the moral censure of the shari'a. Sunni lawyers were clearly reluctant to declare a common practice legally ineffective even if it seemed to collide in some respects with the letter and the spirit of the Koran. Imami law, on the other hand, prohibited the *ṭalāq al-bid'a* completely. It considered invalid any repudiation occurring during a menstrual period, after confinement, or during a period of purity after cohabitation had taken place. It required the presence of two male Muslim witnesses and strict adherence to a specific formula in the declaration of repudiation and outlawed any threefold, irrevocable repudiation. The result has been that divorce is much less common in Imami than in Sunni society. It has even been observed that in regions where Sunnis and Imamis live in close proximity, the divorce rate among the Sunnis, apparently because of the Imami example, is lower than in purely Sunni regions.<sup>15</sup>

Yet does this difference in the law of repudiation reflect a difference in the Shi'i and Sunni attitudes toward women? The statements of the Imams related in the Imami *fiqh* works sharply denounce the injustice done to the wife by the practices of the *ṭalāq al-bid'a* and are in general unfavorable to repudiation, even in its approved form.<sup>16</sup> But the Sunni law, if perhaps less outspoken, also condemns

<sup>15</sup> Linant de Bellefonds, "Le Droit Imāmīte," p. 196.

<sup>16</sup> *Al-Kāfi*, VI, 54-58; *Du'ā'im*, II, 255.



repudiation in general and the *ṭalāq al-bid'a* in particular on a moral plane, though it does nothing effective to prevent its abuse. The Imami denial of the validity of the *ṭalāq al-bid'a* thus reflects less a different attitude to women than a greater readiness in its founders to break not only with the political institutions of the Muslim community but also with some of its social practices.

Of a different order is the divergence of the Imami law of inheritance from that of the Sunni schools. In contrast with the previous cases, Imami law here does not seem to have had much of a precedent in an early Islamic practice or in the moral sentiment of the scholars of the law.<sup>17</sup> Pre-Islamic custom in Arabia restricted inheritance to the agnates or *'aṣaba*, male blood relatives of the deceased who were related only through male links. Female as well as male relatives related through female links (*dhawu 'l-arḥam*) were excluded. The Koran, on the other hand, did not provide comprehensive rules of inheritance but established twelve fixed shares (*furūd*) for certain close relatives, several of them female, in particular the daughter (or daughters), the mother, wife, and sister. Sunni law, evidently following the actual practice, interpreted these Koranic rules as merely modifying the basic right of the *'aṣaba* who would inherit whatever was left after the distribution of the shares fixed by the Koran and, if there were no heirs entitled to a Koranic share, would take the total inheritance. The female relatives and *dhawu 'l-arḥam* generally remained excluded except if there were no *'aṣaba*, however remotely related. Even in this case, according to some of the Sunni schools, the public treasury (*bait al-māl*) or a relative through clientage (*walā'*) of the deceased would receive the inheritance in preference to these relatives. Imami law, on the other hand, broke radically with the privileged position of the *'aṣaba*. This is drastically expressed in a much quoted statement attributed to Imam Ja'far: "The property belongs to the closest [relative] and dust in the mouth of the *'aṣaba*."<sup>18</sup> In Imami law, the closest relatives, irrespective of sex or whether related through male or female links, inherit after satisfaction of the claims of any Koranic heirs. Within the same degree of relationship, the male relatives will generally, in accordance with a Koranic rule, receive double the share of the female. Asked about the reason for this Koranic rule unfavorable to women who, in the words of the questioner, were weaker than men and less resourceful, Imam Ja'far is quoted as explaining that women were not obliged to participate in the jihad, to provide financial support for the family, or to share in the payment of blood money incurred by her clan. 'Alī ar-Riḍā, the eighth Imam, is reported to have answered the same question stating that God, according to Koran, Sura

<sup>17</sup> The Sharīf al-Murtaḍā states, however, that the Companions Ibn al-'Abbās, Jābir b. 'Abd Allāh al-Anṣārī and, according to a report of al-A'mash on the authority of Ibrāhīm al-Nakha'i, al-Zubayr denied the privileged position of the agnates which Sunni law accorded them. Al-Murtaḍā, *al-Masū'il al-Nāṣiriyyāt*, in *al-Jawāmi' al-fiqhiyya* (Tehran, 1276/1851), question no. 193, (lith.; unpaginated).

<sup>18</sup> *Al-Kāfi*, VII, 75.

2:228, preferred men over women by a degree and that women were dependent on men for economic support.<sup>19</sup>

Again it is apparent that the founders of Imami law were more willing than the Sunni scholars to repudiate the actual legal practice of the early Muslim community. In this case, however, the Imami legal reform was not supported by the moral standards also recognized by the Sunnis. It was rather motivated by purely Shi'i concerns and was indeed intimately tied to the central religious beliefs of the Imami Shi'a in the exclusive right of the descendants of the Prophet through his daughter Fāṭima to the political and religious leadership of the Muslim community. Evidently the founders of Imami law were concerned that the right of inheritance should parallel this right of succession to the Prophet. This concern is even more strikingly revealed by an anomaly in the Imami law of inheritance itself. According to an exceptional rule based on the statements of the Imams, the full cousin will inherit in preference to the consanguine uncle (i.e., an uncle related through the grandfather but not through the grandmother), although according to the general rule the uncle, as the closer relative, should exclude the cousin.<sup>20</sup> This anomaly was introduced in order to conform with the Imami thesis that 'Alī, the full cousin of the Prophet, was more closely related to the latter and thus better entitled to the imamate than was al-'Abbās, the ancestor of the 'Abbasid dynasty who was a consanguine uncle of the Prophet. The Imami involvement with the rights of 'Alī, Fāṭima, and their descendants has brought about here a broad reinterpretation of the structure of the family which gave women a much weightier place than they had in Sunni society.

In all three cases discussed here, the motives for the deviation of Imami from Sunni law derived, in one way or another, from typically Shi'i concerns: the abolition of the innovations introduced by the Caliphs, in particular 'Umar, and the return to the Sunna of the Prophet; the strict adherence to the moral standards laid down by the Koran even if it clashed with the common practice of the Muslim community; and the recognition of the rights of the daughter and descendants of the Prophet. How does the Imami treatment of these cases compare with that of the other two branches of the Shi'a whose law is known, the Zaidis and the Isma'ilis?

During most of their history, the Zaidis, in contrast with the Twelver Shi'a and the Isma'ilis, have been divided in their legal doctrine into various schools. Already the early Zaidiyya in Kufa in the second/eighth century was composed of two factions that disagreed about the sources of the law. One of them, the Batriyya, accepted the Sunna of the Prophet and of his Companions as transmitted and accepted by the Muslim community at large. Thus their law was not distinguished from that of the traditionalist school of Kufa and may be disregarded

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 84 f.

<sup>20</sup> See Ibn Bābūya, *Kitāb man lā yaḥduruhu 'l-faqīh*, ed. Maḥmūd al-Zarandī (Tehran 1376/1956), p. 554.



here as not distinctively Shi'i. The other faction, known as the Jārūdiyya, whose views in time generally prevailed among the Zaidis, accepted only traditions transmitted and approved by the Ahl al-bait, that is, the descendants of the Prophet through his daughter Fāṭima, and their legal opinions as a basis for the law. Unlike the Twelver Shi'a, however, they did not further restrict authority in religious matters to those descendants of the Prophet whom they recognized as Imams but accorded, at least in principle, equal authority to all of them. In practice, of course, they had often to choose between the views of various descendants of the Prophet who professed differing legal doctrines, and thus a number of Zaidi legal schools developed.<sup>21</sup>

The earliest extant Zaidi fiqh work is the *Majmū' al-fiqh* ascribed to Imam Zaid b. 'Alī, the brother of Muḥammad al-Bāqir and founder of the Zaidiyya, and edited first by Eugenio Griffini.<sup>22</sup> It cannot be considered an authentic work of the Imam as Griffini believed. Rather, it goes back in substance to Abū Khālid al-Wāsiṭī, a Kufan Jārūdī follower of Zaid, who attributed his own, distinctly Kufan, legal views to the Imam. Abū Khālid's transmission from Zaid was later gathered and arranged in the extant book by his student Ibrāhīm b. Zibriqān who died in 183/799.<sup>23</sup> Whatever authority the work may have enjoyed among the early Jārūdiyya, it is known that the legal doctrine of the other 'Alids, especially of Zaid's brother Muḥammad al-Bāqir, was also transmitted among them. In the first half of the third/ninth century four distinct legal schools gained adherents among the Zaidis in Kufa, partly rivaling and partly complementing one another.<sup>24</sup> The first of these schools followed the doctrine of Aḥmad b. 'Īsā (d. 247/861), a grandson of Zaid, who based his views to a large extent on the transmission of Abū Khālid from Zaid and on the Zaidi transmission from Muḥammad al-Bāqir. The second school was founded by al-Qāsim b. Ibrāhīm, a Medinese 'Alid who occasionally relied on an otherwise little-known Medinese transmission from 'Alī and in general stood close to Medinese legal doctrine. The founder of the third school was the most famous Zaidi traditionist of the time, Muḥammad b. Maṣṣūr al-Murādī, who collected the legal views of numerous earlier and contemporary descendants of the Prophet, among them Aḥmad b. 'Īsā and al-Qāsim b. Ibrāhīm.

<sup>21</sup> See W. Madelung, *Der Imam al-Qāsim ibn Ibrāhīm und die Glaubenslehre der Zaiditen* (Berlin, 1965), pp. 44-52.

<sup>22</sup> *Corpus Iuris di Zaid Ibn 'Alī*, (Milan, 1919).

<sup>23</sup> Madelung, *Der Imam al-Qāsim ibn Ibrāhīm*, pp. 54 f. Griffini's view of the authenticity of the *Majmū' al-fiqh*, earlier criticized by G. Bergsträsser and R. Strothmann, has more recently been defended by F. Sezgin, *Geschichte des arabischen Schrifttums* (Leiden, 1967), I, 552-556. Sezgin's arguments, however, do not account for the fact that the *majmū' al-fiqh* represents Kufan, rather than Medinese, doctrine. Zaid b. 'Alī lived most of his life in Medina and came to Kufa only shortly before his revolt and death. If he had any *fiqh* doctrine of his own, it could be expected to be close to Medinese doctrine like that of his brother Muḥammad al-Bāqir and his nephew Ja'far aṣ-Ṣādiq.

<sup>24</sup> For the following see Madelung, *Der Imam al-Qāsim*, pp. 80 ff.

and amalgamated them into his own legal doctrine. The fourth school was founded by al-Ḥasan b. Yaḥyā, a great-grandson of Zaid, whose legal views appear to have been based partly on those of al-Murādī.<sup>25</sup> The doctrine of these four Zaidi legal schools was gathered and exposed two centuries later by a Kufan Zaidi 'Alid, Abū 'Abd Allāh al-'Alawī (d. 445/1053), in his *Kitāb al-jāmi' al-kāfi*, which is extant in manuscript.

While these schools continued to prevail among the Kufan Zaidis, still other schools arose in the Zaidi states which were founded in the Caspian provinces of Iran and in the Yemen in the later third/ninth century. In the Yemen, the Zaidis accepted the legal doctrine of the founder of the Zaidi imamate there, Yaḥyā b. al-Ḥusain al-Ḥādī ila'l-Ḥaqq (d. 298/911). Al-Ḥādī was a grandson of al-Qāsim b. Ibrāhīm and in his legal opinions generally followed and developed the doctrine of his grandfather. His school has remained authoritative among the Yamani Zaidis to the present. His doctrine was also adopted by part of the Zaidi community of the Caspian littoral. There, however, it was rivaled by the school founded by the Caspian Zaidi Imam al-Uṭrūsh al-Nāṣir li 'l-Ḥaqq (d. 304/917), a contemporary of al-Ḥādī. This school survived until 933/1526-27, when the Caspian Zaidi community officially converted to Twelver Shi'ism.

Despite this diversity of Zaidi legal schools, the treatment of the legal position of women, and in particular of the three areas in which Imami law radically diverged from Sunni law, is remarkably uniform. With one exception, all the Zaidi schools rejected the Imami deviations in the law of marriage, divorce, and inheritance and adopted the positions also supported by the Sunni schools.<sup>26</sup> The Zaidis, less radical in their break with the Muslim community at large than the Imamis, evidently found it difficult to repudiate the prevailing practice even though they shared the basic Shi'i motives for doing so with the founders of Imami law. The attitude of the founders of Zaidi law here stands in clear contrast with their attitude in ritual matters where they mostly did not hesitate to adopt the distinctly Shi'i positions upheld by the Imamis.<sup>27</sup>

The partial exception to the support of the Sunni doctrine among the Zaidi schools occurs in the doctrine of al-Uṭrūsh al-Nāṣir, historically one of the latest of them. The latter in agreement with the Zaidi consensus rejected the legitimacy of the temporary marriage, but he supported the Imami thesis that the *ṭalāq al-bid'ā* in its various forms is invalid and adopted the Imami law of inheritance abolishing

<sup>25</sup> Al-Ḥasan b. Yaḥyā's legal opinions are frequently mentioned as identical with those of al-Murādī in Abū 'Abd Allāh al-'Alawī's *Kitāb al-jāmi' al-kāfi*. Al-Murādī was evidently slightly older than, and perhaps the teacher of, al-Ḥasan b. Yaḥyā whose views he never quotes in his works.

<sup>26</sup> Griffini, *Corpus*, pp. 197, 206 ff., 250 ff.; Ibn al-Murtaḍā, *al-Baḥr az-zakḥkhār*, 5 vols. (Cairo, 1366-1367/1947-1948), III, 22, 153 f., V, 337 ff.

<sup>27</sup> See Strothmann, *Kultus der Zaiditen*.



the privileged position of the agnates.<sup>28</sup> Al-Nāṣir was, no doubt, directly influenced by the doctrine of Muḥammad al-Bāqir and Ja'far aṣ-Ṣādiq. This influence is indeed apparent not only in other areas of his legal system<sup>29</sup> but also in his theology.<sup>30</sup> It is likely that he grew up in an Imami environment in Medina. His brother al-Ḥusain ash-Shā'ir, who lived in Egypt, was a transmitter of Imami hadith.<sup>31</sup>

Isma'ili law was first codified, much later than Twelver Shi'i and Zaidi law, in the first half of the fourth/tenth century by the Fatimid Qāḍī an-Nu'mān. The Isma'ili Shi'a arose as a branch of the Imami Shi'a, their line of Imams parting with that recognized by the Twelvers after Ja'far aṣ-Ṣādiq. Thus it is only natural that Qāḍī an-Nu'mān, no doubt under the instruction of the Fatimid Caliphs and Imams whom he served, relied heavily on the legal traditions of Muḥammad al-Bāqir and Ja'far aṣ-Ṣādiq who are acknowledged as Imams by the Isma'ilis while excluding traditions of the later Imams of the Twelvers from consideration in his works.<sup>32</sup> More surprising is the fact that he supplemented the traditions of the two Imams with traditions from Zaidi sources. Isma'ili law thus represents predominantly Imami law while displaying some minor Zaidi influences. This holds true also in the three major deviations of Imami law affecting women. Isma'ili law agrees with the position of the Twelvers in strictly outlawing the *ṭalāq al-bid'a*. Its rules of inheritance are practically identical with those of the Imamis. But it prohibits the temporary marriage.<sup>33</sup> This deviation from the Imami position was probably not so much motivated by the strong Sunni censure of the institution of *mut'a*; for in other matters equally exposed to Sunni objections Isma'ili law showed no concern for accommodating them. More likely, the somewhat lukewarm support of the institution in Imami law itself where the *mut'a* was considered an inferior form of marriage and the vigorous opposition to it by other Shi'is influenced the founders of Isma'ili law. Formally, in any case, Qāḍī an-Nu'mān based his prohibition of it on Zaidi traditions. While ignoring the Imami traditions from Imams al-Bāqir and aṣ-Ṣādiq permitting the temporary marriage, he quoted a statement of aṣ-Ṣādiq transmitted by the Kufan Zaidi

<sup>28</sup> 'Alī b. Pirmard ad-Dailamī, *al-Mughnī fi ru'ūs masā'il al-khilāt bayn al-Imām al-Nāṣir li 'l-Ḥaqq 'a-sā'ir fuqahā' ahl al-bait wa-fuqahā' al-'amma*, MS Vatican Arab. 1036, fol. 65a-b, 129b-130a; al-Murtaḍā, *al-Masā'il an-Nāṣiriyāt*, nos. 161-163, 190-196.

<sup>29</sup> The Imāmī scholar al-Sharīf al-Murtaḍā, a descendant of al-Nāṣir through his mother, in his *al-Masā'il al-Nāṣiriyāt* discusses 207 points of the doctrine of al-Nāṣir on ritual and law. In numerous instances he points out the agreement of the opinions of al-Nāṣir with the Imāmī position.

<sup>30</sup> See Madelung, *Der Imam al-Qāsim*, pp. 162 f.

<sup>31</sup> See Madelung, "The Sources of Isma'ili Law," p. 36.

<sup>32</sup> For the following see *ibid.*, pp. 29-33.

<sup>33</sup> *Du'ā'im*, II, 226 f., 256 ff., 363 ff.; A. A. Fyzee, *Compendium of Fatimid Law* (Simla, 1969), pp. 21, 42-46, 97 ff.

'Abbād b. Ya'qūb ar-Rawājīnī (d. 250/864) in which the Imam condemned it as a form of prostitution.<sup>34</sup>

Thus neither Zaidi nor Isma'ili law, both of which historically developed later than Twelver Shi'i law, betray any independence in their treatment of the status of women. Insofar as they deviated from Sunni law in this regard, they were directly influenced by the precedent of Twelver Shi'i law. Only at the very beginning of the development of Shi'i legal thought was an original effort made to reform some of the established practices of Muslim society by Imams Muḥammad al-Bāqir and Ja'far aṣ-Ṣādiq. It was a reform that, on balance, raised the status of women substantially. Its limitations were set by the explicit rules of the Koran.

<sup>34</sup> Madelung, "The Sources of Ismā'ili Law," p. 33 n. 23. On 'Abbād b. Ya'qūb see *ibid.*, p. 37. He initially supported the revolt of the Zaidi Imam Muḥammad b. al-Qāsim Ṣāhib al-Ṭāliqān in 219/834, but deserted him when he discovered that Muḥammad was a Mu'tazilī. Abu 'l-Faraj al-Isfahānī, *Maqānil al-Ṭālibiyyīn*, ed. Muḥammad Ṣaqr (Cairo, 1368/1949), p. 588.





# LOVE, LUST, AND LONGING: EROTICISM IN EARLY ISLAM AS REFLECTED IN LITERARY SOURCES

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## INTRODUCTION

Mine and my sweetheart's adventures will never cease;  
Whatever has no beginning does not allow of an end.<sup>1</sup>

To write and talk on eroticism in medieval Islam is a difficult task, considering the variety of aspects and the abundance of sources, as well as the sensitivity of the subject. He who dares to approach it must apparently either leave out many things that would seem to belong to the topic or run the risk of offending the feelings of some delicate readers. To be silent on tender topics, however, is not the prevalent custom of the sources relevant here. On the contrary, many of them are very outspoken in their descriptions of love affairs and erotic acts. Yet, even the most indecent books (of which there was no lack) start with the formula "in the Name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate."

The outstanding *bel esprit*, learned essayist, and sharp-witted historian Jāḥiẓ (ninth century), who is one of the most brilliant writers of Arabic literature and whose works are an invaluable source of the history of customs and morals of early Islamic society, discusses the question of whether or not outspokenness is indecent in the exordium of one of his treatises entitled "Competition between the Slave Girls and the Slave Boys" (*Mufaḥḥarat al-jawārī wal-ghilmān*). And as blunt as he is in favor of those who are outspoken, so is he in his opinion of those who are not. The indignation of certain people who pretend piety and asceticism at hearing certain coarse words designating the male and female parts and copulation is, says Jāḥiẓ, in many cases only artificial; and their knowledge of the subject and sense of decency in general does not go much beyond this indignation. If these and similar words were to be shunned they would not exist in the Arabic language. And then Jāḥiẓ quotes statements and stories related to companions of

<sup>1</sup> Verse by Ḥāfiẓ in *Dīwān-i Ḥāfiẓ*, ed. M. Qazwīnī and Q. Ghanī (Tehran: Chāp-i Sīnā, n.d.), no. 310, line 3.



the Prophet and pious ancestors to show that they were far from prudish in their expressions about erotics.<sup>2</sup>

One of the incidents he mentions is a hadith taken from al-Bukhārī's *Ṣaḥīḥ*, the most venerated collection of reports about actions and sayings of the Prophet, the sacral character of which was in former times hardly inferior to that of the Koran. Since this hadith forms in itself an excellent piece of early erotic literature, I think it appropriate to quote it here in full length, despite—or because of—its outspokenness.

'A'isha [Muḥammad's favorite wife] reported [what follows]: The wife of ar-Rifā'a al-Quraṣī came to the Prophet while I was sitting [in the room] and Abu Bakr ['Ā'isha's father, the later first calif] was present. She said: "O Messenger of God! I had been married to [lit., was under] Rifā'a and he divorced me and then I married Abdarraḥmān ibn az-Zubair, but, by God, he does not have, O Messenger of God, more than this fringe!" And she showed a fringe of her trousers. Her words were heard by Khālid ibn Sa'īd who was [standing] at the door without being asked to enter, and he said to Abu Bakr: "Will you not prevent her from being so candid toward the Messenger of God?" But the Messenger of God just smiled and said to her: "You would like to return to Rifā'a, wouldn't you, that you may taste his sweet honey (*'usaila*) and he may taste your sweet honey again?" Henceforth it [the fringed trouser] became a custom (*sunna*).<sup>3</sup>

The story shows that voices were raised against this kind of candor from the very beginning. It has to be stressed here, however, that outspokenness may occur on quite different levels from such nasty dirt as exists in al-Azdī's Story of Abu l-Qāsim of Baghdad<sup>4</sup> to the pointed and sometimes sarcastic frankness of a Jāḥiẓ up to the highly poetic and elegant metaphors with which Niẓāmī and other poets describe the act of bodily union.

In this paper I do not intend to be indecent; I do not report a single story for the sake of mere indecency. Nor, however, do I refrain from bringing to the knowledge of the reader what I think is the stuff of which eroticism in medieval Islam was made.

The veracity of the sources has already been discussed by Professor Rosenthal in his contribution to this volume. He also rightly stresses the fact that anything that may be said about the topic must of necessity be of an impressionistic cast.

There is, of course, a clear surface difference between fictitious love stories and love adventures forming part of the biographies of historical figures. The former

<sup>2</sup> *Rasā'il al-Jāḥiẓ*, ed. A. M. Hārūn (Cairo, 1384/1964), II, 91 ff.

<sup>3</sup> *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, ed. an-Nawāwī, M. A. Ibrāhīm, and M. Khafājī (Cairo, 1376/1956), VII, 123, Kitāb al-libās, bāb al-izār al-muhaddab.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. C. Brockelmann, *Geschichte der arabischen Litteratur* (Leiden, 1937-1949), I, 155; Suppl. I, 254.

are represented, for example, by stories in *The Thousand and One Nights* and in the *Book of the Peacock* (*Tūjīnāma*) or by the Persian romantic epics, no matter whether their heroes are taken from pre-Islamic history as is Nizāmī's (d. 605/1209) *Khusrou and Shirin*, from early Arabic tradition as is *Lailā and Majnūn*, or are of obscure origin as is Gurgānī's (fl. eleventh century) *Wīs and Rāmīn*, the plot of which is said to stem from Parthian history. The love adventures of historical figures are to be found in the biographies of poets, and here the *Book of Songs* of Abu l-Faraj al-Iṣfahānī (d. 356/967) has to be mentioned as a magnificent masterpiece of early Arabic literature. Both anonymous and historical (or quasi-historical) tales are found in such collections of love tales as the famous *Battlefields of the Loving* (*Maṣārī' al-'ushshāq*) of as-Sarrāj (d. 500/1106) and in many other sources. But on closer look it is seen that an author may make a fictitious work the vehicle for distinct personal views on love and love morals as is the case in Gurgānī's and Nizāmī's romantic epopees. On the other hand, the biographical anecdotes about a famous figure are not necessarily factual. Doubt as to their reality is particularly advisable in the case of a poet, where the anecdotes form the so-called *akhbār*, the historical commentary, to his verses.

A good example of this doubtful veracity is presented by the *akhbār* of 'Umar ibn abi Rabī'a, the great Arabic poet of the first century of Islam, who was, according to the judgment of early authorities (among them the poet Farazdaq), the best love poet and the unrivaled master in the description of "the ladies of the bridal tents."<sup>5</sup> In these *akhbār* we are confronted with a number of contradictory statements as to the veracity of 'Umar's poetry. When the Umayyad princess Ramla whom our poet once adored asked him which ladies he had hinted at in this and that line, he answered: "To no particular one. I am a poet, who likes to make gallant songs and to praise female beauty." Ramla, apparently not particularly persuaded by this answer, riposted: "You scoundrel, you disgracer of every woman! Aren't your verses on all Ḥijāzī tongues, even the calif and his emirs reciting them, and you declare not to speak of any particular woman!"<sup>6</sup>

In another anecdote we are told that somebody asked the old 'Umar during the circumambulation of the Ka'ba whether he had done everything he mentioned in his poems, and he said: "Yes, and I beg God's forgiveness!"<sup>7</sup>

In the first of these two anecdotes 'Umar clearly maintains that his poetry is fictitious, whereas in the second he apparently admits its factuality. And the same contradiction is met with on the plane of moral judgment. In one report 'Umar makes the statement that he never "raised the gown" of a female illicit to him<sup>8</sup>

<sup>5</sup> *Kitāb al-Aghānī* (Cairo: Ṭab'at Dār al-Kutub, 1383/1963), I, 75-76, 106, 113, 120 (hereafter *Aghānī*).

<sup>6</sup> Pseudo-Jāḥiẓ, *Al-Kutāb al-musammā bil-Muḥāsīn wal-aḍḍād*, ed. G. van Vloten (Leiden, 1898), pp. 342 f.

<sup>7</sup> *Aghānī*, I, 75.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 77.



whereas in another tale he contrasts himself with an 'Udhrite friend (who is the hero of that story) and says: "Like myself he was a victim of love and passion for women, but unlike myself he would not secretly enjoy forbidden fruits and easily forget them afterward."<sup>9</sup>

It is certainly not too difficult to find at least tentative solutions of these contradictions. That 'Umar denied the factuality of his poems in front of Ramla is easily understandable. Admittedly, it would have spoiled any chances he might hope for with the princess. What he said to Ramla has to be looked at in the light of a number of his verses in which he promises or asserts his exclusive love to Zainab, Lailā, Su'dā, Jumī, Nu'm, ar-Rahāb, respectively, and probably to still others.<sup>10</sup>

As for the second of the statements quoted above, it was made by the aged 'Umar and directed to a man; nothing, therefore, was at stake in telling the truth in this case. Moreover 'Umar possessed, according to the sources, the same life pattern as so many other Muslim poets: shortly before dying he repented of what he had done. The statements in which he condemns or criticizes his own deeds may, therefore, belong to this last period. But we may take them as well to be inventions of a later time. His *rāwīs* (transmitters of his poetry), at any rate, were convinced that 'Umar was not chaste and would "not depict without acting, not languish [for his beloved] without quenching his thirst."<sup>11</sup> Nevertheless, they did not hesitate to transmit his poems as well as the escapades implied.

*Naql al-kufri laisa bi-kufri*, "to transmit unbelief is not unbelief": this is a famous axiom by which later authors sought to vindicate the narration of an objectionable story.<sup>12</sup> The same maxim may have guided many a compiler of morally offensive texts also in cases where it is not mentioned. But the permissibility for poets to say things at variance with a high moral standard is also expressly stated by an early writer on poetics. In his *Naqd as-shi'r* (Critical Approach to Poetry) Qudāma ibn Ja'far (d. 310/922 or later) says that a fine love poem does not necessarily imply a poet's personal experience or conviction, and he must also not be reproached if what he says in his poems is morally reprehensible. What is demanded from him is not so much truth and morality as good poetic style and suggestive description. Qudāma makes use here of the two Aristotelian notions, matter and form (*mādda/ṣūra*). The task of every artist, he says, is to give any matter appropriate to his art the best form he can achieve. A

<sup>9</sup> Aghānī (Cairo, 1285/1868 = first edition, hereafter cited as I Aghānī) X, 50 f. German translation in M. Weisweiler, *Arabesken der Liebe: Frühislamische Geschichten von Liebe und Frauen* (Leiden, 1954), no. 40 (hereafter Weisweiler).

<sup>10</sup> Many examples in his *Dīwān*.

<sup>11</sup> Aghānī, I, 119.

<sup>12</sup> Maqqarī uses the axiom *ḥākī l-kufri laisa bi-kāfir*, after having quoted some frivolous verses, cf. *Nuṣṣa al-fih*, ed. R. Dozy et al. (Leiden, 1855-1861; repr. Amsterdam Oriental Press, 1967), II, 343.

carpenter's work is not judged by the wood he has used.<sup>13</sup> 'Umar's *rāwīs*, though seemingly critical of the contents of his verses, which they deemed to be veracious, found the poetry excellent. Their moral scruples—if any—were, so to speak, overcome by their poetic delight. Form, the most powerful element in Islamic culture, won the battle over morality.<sup>14</sup>

That being the fact, it is small wonder that there exists a vast variety of erotic literature in medieval Islam. In addition to the genres already mentioned—poetry, tales, anecdotes, epics—I must point here to the informative literature dealing with different aspects of love and written on various levels of education and etiquette. There are philosophical treatises on the topic such as the famous *Risāla fi l-'ishq* (Treatise on Love) by Ibn Sīnā<sup>15</sup> which places love and longing within the Neoplatonic context as being the universal force behind the phenomena of life and motion, all of which strive to turn back into the lap of the One. There are handbooks and chapters on courtly love and wedlock such as the famous lofty and elegant *Tauq al-ḥamāma* (Necklace of the Dove) by the Andalusian Ibn Ḥazm (d. 456/1046) and the much more pragmatic chapters in the *Qābūsnāma*, an early Persian codex of princely conduct. There are religious discussions of marriage and related issues such as the "Book of Marriage" in Ghazzālī's (d. 505/1111) *Revival of the Religious Sciences*. And there are the practical guidebooks of *bāh* or coition, more or less literalized by interspersed verses and anecdotes, the most famous of which, the *Perfumed Garden* by Sheikh Nafzāwī (fl. 1400), became known in European countries as a sort of Arabic *Kamasutra*. Among the important sources for our subject are a number of brilliant essays by the illustrious bel esprit Jāḥiẓ of which we have already mentioned one, and a second occurs below.

On the opposite pole from the noble and high-minded *Necklace of the Dove* and from the chaste 'Udhrite poetry is the *mujūn* literature, obscene anecdotes, and poems (mostly beyond the candor of even a Jāḥiẓ). Abū Nuwās (d. 198/813 or later), one of the greatest Arabic poets, belonged to those excelling in it. In many of his poems he described the anatomical details of his intercourse with boys and girls in a unique mixture of metaphor, wit, and filth.

The attitude toward this kind of poetry is echoed in the introductory remarks to a choice of *mujūn* presented in the fine anthology *Yatīmat ad-dahr* (Solitaire of the Time). The poet is Ibn al-Ḥajjāj (fl. tenth century) who was famous for his

<sup>13</sup> Cf. the discussion of this passage in my essay "Die beste Dichtung ist die lügenreichste," *Oriens*, 23-24 (1970-71), 55-56, and G. Schoeler, *Einige Grundprobleme der autochthonen und der aristotelischen arabischen Literaturtheorie*, *Abhandlungen für die Kunde des Morgenlandes*, XLI, 4 (Wiesbaden, 1975), pp. 45-46.

<sup>14</sup> I have developed this idea in a lecture on magical worldview in medieval Islam, which I gave recently at Harvard University (to be published in *Asiatische Studien*).

<sup>15</sup> This treatise has been analyzed by G. E. von Grunebaum: "Avicenna's *Risāla fi l-'ishq* and Courtly Love," *Journal of Near Eastern Studies*, 11 (1952), 233-238; German version in his *Kritik und Dichtkunst: Studien zur arabischen Literaturgeschichte* (Wiesbaden, 1955), pp. 70-77.



poignant but dirty verses. Although the obscenity of these poems should forbid him to quote them, says Tha'ālibī, the compiler of the book (d. 429/1038), their widespread popularity makes it permissible, even advisable, to insert them.<sup>16</sup>

Thus it becomes clear that besides the question of truth the moral issue is steadily at stake in our topic. Being myself a moralist I treat the topic with the view of a moralist. Morality implies decency but not prudishness, a value scale but not value judgments. Before discussing some major erotic relations as reflected in literary sources, I must dwell a little more on the general attitude toward eroticism and sexuality in the Islamic world.

#### THE GENERAL ATTITUDE TOWARD EROTICISM

Man is of flesh and blood,  
Not is he stone nor idol statue.<sup>17</sup>

As is the case with everything in Islamic society, the attitude toward marriage and sex life has largely been shaped after the model prefigured in the Koran and in the Sunna: the Holy Scripture of Islam and the conduct of the Prophet Muḥammad, in whom, according to Allah's statement, "You have a noble pattern" (Sura 33:21). Muḥammad's example is comprised of the happy, monogamous matrimonial love for his first wife Khadīja, who bore him four daughters, and, in the second half of his life, the polygamous relationship with a steadily growing harem, a relationship the tensions of which have left their traces in the Koran (cf. below). At any rate, he was in favor of marriage and did not conceal his propensity for female beauty. One of his famous sayings runs: "Three things of your world are dear to me: Women, perfume, and prayer."<sup>18</sup> Another *hadith* states that with every copulation a man performs a meritorious act comparable with almsgiving.<sup>19</sup> It is this example and this confession of the Prophet which made erotic pleasure if not an integral part, in any case a not unseemly aspect of a pious man's life.

Persian and Greek traditions were easily harmonized with the Islamic

<sup>16</sup> Ath-Tha'ālibī, *Yatīmat ad-dahr* (Damascus, 1304/1887) II, 211.

<sup>17</sup> Verse by Abu l-Ḥakam al-Bāhilī, physician and poet (d. 549/1156), in Ibn abi Usaibi'a, *'Uyūn al-anbā'*, ed. A. Müller (Königsberg 1884), II, 150 (hereafter *'Uyūn al-anbā'*). The verse is in a long satirical poem on the troubles and debaucheries of an evening party which eventually ruins the host. A German version by me is due to appear in the second volume of the Festschrift in honor of Father F. M. Pareja.

<sup>18</sup> The saying is quoted in various forms in as-Sarrāj's *Maṣāri' al-'ushshūq* (Beirut: Dār Sādir, n.d.), I, 14 and 103 (hereafter *Maṣāri'*) and is discussed in Ibn 'Arabī's *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam*, ed. A. 'Aḥī (Cairo, 1365/1946), pp. 214 ff.

<sup>19</sup> Hadith no. 25 in an-Nawawī's (d. 676/1277) *Arba'īn ḥadīthan* (The Forty Sayings [of the Prophet]), German version in J. Schacht, *Der Islam mit Ausschluss des Qor'āns* (Tübingen, 1931), p. 21.

framework. To be sure, their influx brought forth some slight modifications, but they did not basically change the general Islamic attitude. That attitude is crystallized in Ghazzālī's "Book of Marriage" in his *Revival of the Religious Sciences* which is discussed in Professor Bellamy's contribution elsewhere in this volume. I, therefore, limit myself to some principal aspects, which I then contrast with a number of Greek and Iranian views.

Ghazzālī quotes the statement of Ibn 'Abbās, "The best man of this community is he who has the greatest number of wives," and comments upon it that because *shahwa*, concupiscence, rules over the nature of the Arabs many of their pious people have been extremely active in *nikāḥ*, marrying or coition.<sup>20</sup> A little later he says:

If in the nature of a man concupiscence is so strong or prevalent that one wife would not suffice to control it, he is advised to marry more than one until four. If, then, God gives him love and mercy so that his heart be content with them it is all right; but if not, change is advisable for him. 'Alī married again seven days after the death of Fāṭima. And his son Ḥasan is reported to have been such a *minkāḥ* as to marry more than two hundred wives, sometimes concluding the contract with four or divorcing four of them simultaneously and thus exchanging them. The Prophet would, therefore, say to him, "You resemble my nature and my character!"<sup>21</sup>

Ghazzālī clearly states that coition, though its primary sense is progeniture, has a value of its own, its unrivaled but always all too brief delight arousing man's longing for the lasting one in the world to come.

Notwithstanding his positive attitude toward sex life, he is alert to its dangers and sometimes points to it as one of the great snares of Satan. On commenting upon a rare interpretation of the verse: "I betake me for refuge to the Lord...and against the mischief of the night when it overtaketh me" (Sura 113:3) he interprets "mischief" in the sense of the erection of the penis and adds, "this is a hard affliction, which, when it surges, neither reason nor religion may resist. Thus, sex, though being useful as an incentive for the two lives as was said before, is nevertheless the strongest instrument of the Devil against the Sons of Adam."<sup>22</sup>

The dialectic attitude is prevalent throughout the *Revival*. No wonder, therefore, that it is also present in the "Book of Marriage." But it is likewise true that the dialectic and paradoxical description of love is rooted primarily in the character of love itself and therefore appears in the sources again and again in manifold variations. It is interesting to compare Ghazzālī's attitude with that in the chapters on marriage and sexual life in the *Qābūsnāma* and with some relevant

<sup>20</sup> Ghazzālī, *Ihyā' 'ulūm ad-dīn* (Cairo, 1387/1967), II, 37.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., p. 38.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., p. 36.



advice in medical books. In the *Qābūsnāma* the following points clearly differ from the attitude represented by Ghazzālī.

The author makes a sharp difference between marriage and sexual or erotic pleasure, *tamattu'*:

If you take a wife do not strive after wealth and do not choose her for her beauty. For, if you want beauty you may take a sweetheart. The wife, however, must be chaste and pious and a lady who loves her husband and is shamefaced and a good thrifty housewife. It has been said: A good wife is the welfare of life.<sup>23</sup>

And again:

A wife must be chosen from a good family and you must know whose daughter she is. For a wife is taken as a housewife, not for carnal pleasure. As for this latter a slave girl may be bought from the bazaar without too much trouble and expenditure. But the wife must be perfect and mature and intelligent, one who is trained in housekeeping by her mother and her father. If you find such a wife do not hesitate to woo her and be eager to attain her.<sup>24</sup>

This advice, though compatible with the Koran's order to marry one to four wives and to "take what your right hand possesses," is not in line with the view of Ghazzālī who makes the following statement on the issue:

In order that the heart be free from trouble, taking a slave girl as concubine (*nikāḥ al-ama*) has been allowed for fear of tribulation, though it leads to the enslavement of the children, which is almost equivalent to ruining them (*nau' min al-ihlāk*). It is, therefore, prohibited to him who can afford taking a free woman. But enslaving a child is the minor evil compared with causing the ruin of one's religion, since for the child it means only a miserable state for a certain period in his life, whereas for the adult to commit a crime [Ghazzālī is hinting here at adultery] would mean to forfeit the life of the Hereafter, compared with one day of which a long life is insignificant.<sup>25</sup>

Another point in the *Qābūsnāma* which clearly differs from Ghazzālī's view is that the princely author not only allows but recommends his son not to restrict himself to either of the sexes. He speaks of the relations to slave boys (*ghulām*) here without, however, delving into any details of homoeroticism.<sup>26</sup>

<sup>23</sup> Cf. the 26th chapter: How To Woo a Wife, Persian text ed. S. Nafīsī (Tehran, 1342/1964), p. 93.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., pp. 37-38.

<sup>26</sup> Cf. the 14th and 15th chapters: On How To Practice Love and the Etiquette of It and On [Erotic] Pleasure (*tamattu'*).

A third point lacking in Ghazzālī's chapter but stressed by the author of the *Qābūsnāma* is moderation (*i'tidāl*).<sup>27</sup> Ghazzālī leaves it to one's individual judgment to decide according to his nature and his living conditions whether or not he should marry and the quantity of the carnal pleasures he should allow himself. Thus both authorities cling to one of the two leading principles of Greek and Arabic medicine, respectively, one to that of symmetry and moderation, the other to that of shaping one's life, habits and ecological condition in accordance with his temperament.<sup>28</sup>

This brings us to some medical aspects of sex, which I address below, though I do not intend to discuss the physical details of sex life or venereal diseases as described in the *Perfumed Garden* or in other medieval books on *bāh* and in medical literature. Suffice it to say that the view of Galen and other Greek physicians was that a man's abstinence from sexual intercourse as a rule results in his becoming melancholic, as soon as the putrid matter of the retained semen reaches his head. This was then the medical explanation of why so many great lovers went insane, though it accounts only for the male.<sup>29</sup> Rūmī alludes to it in a great poem on the benefits of motion and on the damage of the lack of it, making use of the double meaning of *hawā*, air and concupiscence, in the following verse:

The air becomes putrified if closed up in a pit,  
Look at separation, what damage the *dirang-i hawā*, it caused by protraction  
of carnal desire!<sup>30</sup>

We might dwell here on the old topos of how the love-sick are cured by eliciting from them the secret cause of their disease which may be done by the simple stratagem of taking the pulse, amply described in Ibn Sīnā's *Canon*.<sup>31</sup> But since this has already been discussed by many authors, I only mention that the story is much older, the earliest instance we know of going back to the famous Greek physician Erasistratos who cured the son of a Parthian king who had fallen in love with his father's favorite wife.<sup>32</sup>

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., p. 61.

<sup>28</sup> On these ideas see my article "Secular and Religious Features of Medieval Arabic Medicine," in *Asian Medical Systems*, ed. Charles Leslie (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1976), pp. 44-62.

<sup>29</sup> On the theories about melancholy in Greek antiquity see H. Flashar, *Melancholie und Melancholiker in den medizinischen Theorien der Antike* (Berlin, 1966); cf. also M. Ullmann, *Die Medizin im Islam*, Handbuch der Orientalistik, Ergänzungsband VI, 1 (Leiden and Cologne, 1970), p. 194 n. 1.

<sup>30</sup> Jalāl ud-dīn Rūmī, *Dīwān*, ed. Furūzānfarr (Tehran, 1334/1956 and later reprints), no. 214, verse 4: *Hawā chu ḥāqin gardad ba-chāh zahr shawad/bi-bīn ba-bain chi ziyān kard az dirang-i hawā!*

<sup>31</sup> Cf. E. G. Browne, *Arabic Medicine* (Cambridge University Press, 1962), pp. 84 f.

<sup>32</sup> The story is mentioned in an early Arabic manuscript called *Adab al-ṭabīb* (The Etiquette of the Physician) by the rather unknown Ishāq ibn 'Alī ar-Ruhāwī. I am preparing the edition of this text.



Another advice sometimes encountered in medical literature of the *hiḏḏ aṣ-ṣiḥḥa* type (hygiene and prophylaxis) is not to marry an old woman, this being detrimental to man's health.<sup>33</sup> I do not, however, remember having ever read anything in medical literature against an old man's taking a young wife, nor anything on the minimum age a girl should reach before getting married.<sup>34</sup> In fine literature, though, old fragile men still engaged in erotic affairs are sometimes made the target of mockery. Of a senile wooer unable to consummate the marriage, the great Sa'dī says:

That old man who cannot rise without a stick,  
How should his stick rise?<sup>35</sup>

On the other hand medical or rather pharmaceutical literature is very rich in remedies for all sorts of sexual problems and defects. The first man in Islam to have recourse to an aphrodisiac was reportedly the Prophet himself. When complaining to Gabriel his weakness of potency the angel told him to eat *harīsa* (a wheat porridge with meat); it would give him the power of forty men.<sup>36</sup> Besides the numerous and manifold aphrodisiacs there are medications for the female organ changing its quality and size according to the man's want or gusto.<sup>37</sup> And where the range of medicine proper ceased, magic, both white and black, might fill the gap.<sup>38</sup> The story in *Wis and Rāmīn* of how King Moubad's virility was bound by a talisman sounds like an echo of a similar story told about the Prophet, the only difference being that the Prophet was released as soon as the angel had revealed to him where the talisman was hidden and he had it removed, whereas

<sup>33</sup> Ibn abi Uṣaibi'a reports it among the counsels given by Ḥārith ibn Kalada and by Thiyādūq, the personal physician of Ḥajjāj ibn Yūsuf, the famous governor of Iraq. Thiyādūq (who, judging from his name, was a Christian) says: "Do not cohabit with an old woman since this engenders sudden death ('*Uyūn al-unbā'*, I, 111 and 122).

<sup>34</sup> For the pious Muslim the minimum age for the girl's marriage was certainly indicated by the example of the Prophet who married 'Ā'isha when she was only nine years old, cf. *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, VII, 6 and 19, Book of Marriage, chapters 11 and 60.

<sup>35</sup> Personal communication of Sayyid M. A. Djamalzadeh in a long letter on eroticism in the Islamic world, dated 14 April 1977.

<sup>36</sup> Report in a compilation of prophetic medicine by Jalāl ad-Dīn as-Suyūṭī (fifteenth century), English version by C. Elgood, "Ṭibbu ul-Nabbi [sic] or Medicine of the Prophet," *Osiris*, 14 (1962), 60.

<sup>37</sup> Cf. Ullmann, *Die Medizin im Islam*, pp. 193 f.

<sup>38</sup> That a loving couple may be separated by magic (*sihr*) is stated in the Koran (Sura 2:102[96]), and this statement along with similar ones is quoted by the author of the *risāla* on magic and astrology in the *Rasā'il Ikhwān aṣ-ṣaḥā'* (Beirut, 1377/1957), IV, 290 f. Magical recipes to arouse or kill concupiscence, love, etc. are described in the *Picatrix*, cf. Pseudo-Magriti, "*Picatrix*": *Das Ziel des Weisen*, trans. from the Arabic by Hellmut Ritter and Martin Plessner, Studies of the Warburg Institute, Vol. 27 (London, 1962), pp. 261 f., but also in pharmaceutical books such as the *Tadhkirat ūli l-albāb* of al-Anṣārī and many similar sources.

poor Moubad remained under the charm until his death because a flood came and carried away the bundle of copper, brass, and iron.<sup>39</sup>

What is common to Ghazzālī's "Book of Marriage," to the relevant chapters in the *Qābūs-nāma*, and to medical advice is the predominance of arguments based more or less exclusively on the male interest. Ghazzālī does not lose a single word on the lot of those two hundred wives of Ḥasan whom he divorced. The author of the *Qābūs-nāma* warns his son against teaching his wife feelings of jealousy by introducing her to other men, jealousy being what corrupted every woman. But it evidently did not occur to him that a true wife's jealousy must be provoked primarily by her husband's taking a sweetheart "from the bazaar."

Happily, this is not the whole truth. The reality of eroticism in medieval Islam was far too multifarious to fit into the framework of erotic theories. A few examples of that reality follow, glimpses gleaned from varied sources according to which they may be facets either of real life or, at least, of real dreams.

#### MAJOR TYPES OF LOVE OR EROTIC RELATIONS

The reed-pen has no tongue to speak out the enigma of love.<sup>40</sup>

If we look into the sources of early Islam to find out which kind of erotic relations between a man and a girl or woman were possible and did, in fact, exist, we meet, I think, at least, four different forms: 'Udhrite love, flirtation and illicit love affairs, relation to slave girls, and wedlock and matrimonial love. There are, of course, many variations and transitions in between, but they are discussed under these four headings.

#### 'UDHRITE LOVE

O Lord, let her be near, when I shall die!  
O what sweet death, if she be near my grave!<sup>41</sup>

An astonishing phenomenon of early Arabic love poetry and love life is, no doubt, 'Udhrite love. It is that type of love which in the most epigrammatic form imaginable was described in Goethe's short poem "Musterbilder" in his West-eastern Diwan:

<sup>39</sup> This hadith appears several times in Bukhārī's *Ṣaḥīḥ*: Kitāb Jihād, bāb ṣifat Iblīs; Kitāb aṭ-ṭibb, bāb 47, 49, and 50; Kitāb Adab, bāb 56. The nurse's spell on Moubad is related in the 38th chapter of *Wīs and Rāmīn*, text, ed. K. S. Aini (Tehran, 1970), pp. 109 f.; English trans. G. Morrison (New York: Columbia University Press, 1972), pp. 70 f.

<sup>40</sup> Verse by Ḥāfiz in *Dīwān-i Ḥāfiz*, ed. Qazwīnī and Ghanī, no. 440, verse 3.

<sup>41</sup> Verse by Jamīl in Aghānī, VIII, 151, l. 5.



Ferhad und Schirin,  
 Liebe, nicht Liebesgewinn.  
 (Farhad and Shirin  
 Love, not love's gain.)

The common features of 'Udhrite love are that Fate, or, rather, social conditions prohibit the physical or, at any rate, the constant matrimonial union of the loving couple, but they remain faithful to each other until death. 'Udhrite love is absolute love, love as idea, love as religion. Such love is almost of necessity tragic. And its tragedy is a symbol of the incompatibility of the absolute and the concrete, of the ideal and the real life. Still, we find stories in which long 'Udhrite suffering is finally crowned by a happy union. But this "happy end" is, then, also the end of the story.

The origin of this kind of love in Bedouin society has been discussed by von Grunebaum, who pointed to close parallels between 'Udhrite and Greek love poems and apparently saw the root of 'Udhrite behavior in Greek influence.<sup>42</sup> But I do not think that this comparative argument is sufficient explanation of the phenomenon.

We do not know how Muḥammad regarded 'Udhrite love. There is a famous dictum attributed to him, saying: "Who loves and remains chaste and dies, is a martyr."<sup>43</sup> But this is most likely a spurious tradition. At any rate, his own attitude is obviously contrary to 'Udhrite behavior. We may also ask ourselves whether the interdict of suicide in the Koran does not include an attack against the 'Udhrite love-death.<sup>44</sup> However that may be, the mere fact of its existence corrects the error of Ghazzālī's opinion about Arab sensuality.

As for the types of 'Udhrite love, it is perhaps most practical to distinguish mainly between two situations: one resulting in illness and ending with the love-death of one or both of the lovers, the other being only a transitory phase leading to final union. The 'Udhrite phase with all its possible vicissitudes, secret meetings, and ever new separations may and, in fact, very often does, occupy by far the longer part of the story. The first type is exemplified by such famous

<sup>42</sup> G. E. von Grunebaum, *Der Islam im Mittelalter* (Zürich and Stuttgart, 1963), pp. 401 f. and n. 88.

<sup>43</sup> According to A. Schimmel (*Mystical Dimensions of Islam* [Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1975], p. 13), this hadith is, indeed, coined.

<sup>44</sup> Koran, Sura 4:29. According to R. Paret (*Der Koran: Kommentar und Konkordanz* [Stuttgart, Berlin, Cologne, Mainz, 1971]), the function of the reflexive pronoun *anfusakum* is collective here, not individual. Thus the meaning of the phrase would be "do not kill each other!" But in a story related in the Book of Songs a love-sick poet determined to die from his passion is exhorted: "What gain [lit.: art] is there in killing yourself and thereby trespassing against your Lord?!" (*lamā arabuka fī an taqtulu nafsaka wa ta'thamu bi-rabbika* [Aghānī, VIII, 161]). This sounds very much like an allusion to Sura 4:29. In medical literature this verse is also sometimes understood as a divine vindication of the healing art. The problem of suicide in Islam is discussed s.v. "Intihār," *Encyclopedia of Islam*, 2d ed.

couples as Jamīl and Buthaina, Majnūn and Lailā, Qais ibn Dharrīh and Lubnā, 'Urwa ibn Ḥizām and 'Afrā'. In three of these four cases the physical union between the lovers was prevented by the family of the girl, their motive being either the alleged social inferiority of the young man or, in the case of Majnūn, a certain eccentricity or even mental disturbance.<sup>45</sup> In the fourth, that of Qais and Lubnā, the 'Udhrite relation does not exist in the beginning. But the happily married couple is separated by the intrigue of Lubnā's mother, whose indignation at having lost her son's undivided veneration instigates her to make a point of Lubnā's infertility as posing a risk to the family's riches.<sup>46</sup> In other words, there is a clear social background to 'Udhrite love here too. Still, it may be argued that most young men in a similar situation would probably resort to one of the possibilities conceded to them by the rules of their society, rules that the father of Jamīl summarized in the words "Women are replaceable!"<sup>47</sup> Another social cause is put forward by that brilliant social historian and bel esprit of the ninth century Baṣra, al-Jāḥiẓ, who says in his treatise on singing girls that the love between Jamīl and Buthaina and between other famous couples of that period was possible only because girls and women went without veils and met freely with men, laughing and chattering and looking at each other without their husbands' (or parents') reproving them as long as nothing reprehensible happened.<sup>48</sup>

On the other hand we should be careful not to explain everything too hastily by just the social conditions. Some of the 'Udhrite stories seem to point to more or less pathological conduct; in other cases, 'Udhrite demeanor may merely have been a disguise or stratagem. Thus, the following famous story of Jamīl and Buthaina seems to me not quite devoid of a certain ambiguity. "Wouldn't you like now to give me the reward of all my ardent love for you?" asked Jamīl of Buthaina during a conversation in her tent one night. "What do you mean?" "The thing that normally happens between lovers!" Buthaina refuses brusquely, saying that she will not see him again should he hint at the like once more. But now Jamīl says, "I only wanted to know your opinion about that. Had you complied with my wish, I would have killed you with my sword immediately, because if you granted it to me, I knew that you would grant it to others, too." Now, if this were the whole story, we should certainly not harbor any doubt on the 'Udhrite character of Jamīl. But we are told that, upon the hint of a servant, Buthaina's father and brother were watching the two with swords under their gowns, and that, after hearing this dialogue, they went away saying to each other: "We need not hinder this man from meeting her any more."<sup>49</sup> Taking into account the fact

<sup>45</sup> 'Urwa: *Aghānī*, XX, 152 f.; Jamīl: *ibid.*, VIII, 108; 124, line 3; 110, line 14. Another example is that of the poet Muraqqish: *Maṣā'ir*, I, 227.

<sup>46</sup> *Aghānī*, IX, 181 f.

<sup>47</sup> *Wa fi n-nisā' 'iwad* (*Aghānī*, VIII, 129, line 18).

<sup>48</sup> Jāḥiẓ, *Rasā'il*, II, 148.

<sup>49</sup> *Aghānī*, VIII, 105.



that Jamīl appears much more active and cunning in the stories than his 'Udhrite colleagues ever do, we may not exclude that in this case he made a serious proposal but sensing either the coy reserve of Buthaina or the presence of her guardians, or the one as well as the other, he withdrew into the 'Udhrite guise or pose.

What I intend here is, of course, not to degrade or even question the value of 'Udhrite love but only to make it clear that this love was neither an inborn virtue nor an ideal state but a process, the process of making a virtue of necessity. Nature and character did, however, certainly play an important role in many a plot of 'Udhrite love.

If we take Majnūn to be an example of a pathological disposition, we must not forget the other and more lofty aspect of his love, namely, that he, more or less consciously, shunned his beloved in order not to spoil the ideal dream by a perhaps less ideal reality, an idea which became widespread with medieval mystics.<sup>50</sup> Also, we may think of another idea that became almost commonplace in the post-Freudian era and was expounded for example in Thomas Mann's novel *Doktor Faustus* and in an essay by Gottfried Benn: the idea that artistic creativity needs a pathological structure in the body of the genius, or as Plato phrased it, that the poets and the loving are *μανιακοί*.<sup>51</sup>

'Udhrite elements exist also in the love poetry of non-'Udhrite poets such as 'Umar ibn abi Rabī'a, and, incredible though it may sound, even in that of the terrible rake calif Walīd ibn Yazīd, who boasted of his ability to emulate the 'Udhrite style.<sup>52</sup>

In a more sophisticated way, enriched by a courtly element and some features of 'Umar ibn abi Rabī'a, this style again manifests itself in the poetry of 'Abbās ibn al-Aḥnaf, a favorite of Hārūn ar-Rashīd and of certain ladies of the calif's harem, such as Umm Ja'far. That his beloved lady, whom he praised under the name of Fauz, was different from the Bedouin girls of our 'Udhrite poets is clear from his ghazals.

Fauz is beaming upon the castle.  
When she walks amongst her maids of honor  
you would think that she is walking upon eggs and green bottles.  
S: mebody told me that she cried for help  
on beholding a lion engraved upon a signet-ring.<sup>53</sup>

Not all the poems of 'Abbās are expressions of ideal love. In his *Dīwān* there is also a description of an orgy with singing girls, which would be unimaginable in

<sup>50</sup> Cf. H. Ritter, *Das Meer der Seele* (Leiden, 1955), p. 432.

<sup>51</sup> The saying *al-'ishqu junūn* (love is madness) is sometimes attributed to Socrates in Arabic sources (cf. Maṣā'ir, I, 15 and 60).

<sup>52</sup> D. Derenk, *Leben und Dichtung des Omayyadenkalifen al-Walīd ibn Yazīd*, Islamkundliche Untersuchungen, Band 27 (Freiburg im Breisgau, 1974), p. 54.

<sup>53</sup> *Dīwān al-'Abbās ibn al-Aḥnaf*, ed. K. al-Bustānī (Beirut: Dār Ṣādir, 1965), p. 136.

the poetry of true 'Udhrite lovers. Nonetheless, he boasted of his love being superior to that of Jamīl and 'Urwa ibn Ḥizām:

Jamīl did not love like myself!

Verily, neither did 'Urwa, the martyr of love.<sup>54</sup>

As was pointed out by J. Hell, 'Abbās ibn al-Aḥnaf is an important link between old Arabian and Andalusian love poetry and, therefore, according to Hell, one of the predecessors of the European troubadours.<sup>55</sup> I hardly need to emphasize, however, that Andalusian love poetry in general is no longer truly 'Udhrite. To be sure, Ibn Zaidūn's love songs for Wallāda show many 'Udhrite elements. But as the whole affair was, particularly on the part of Wallāda, no more than a flirtation, these elements hardly go beyond the function of romantic scenery.

The 'Udhrite element has also flown into the Persian ghazal, so much so as to become an integral part of this highly stylized, hyperbolic, and opalescent type of poetry. At least in Ḥāfiẓ's poetry the ghazal has become multilayered and multifunctional, the same words being applicable to the most different objects of human love, comprising a sheikh, a princely patron, or even the Lord of the universe as well as a harlot, a lady, a pretty slave, or a pleasure boy.<sup>56</sup> I admit, however, that not every ghazal is similarly vague as to its object, and at least the matter of gender is sometimes clear from certain hints in the text, mainly hints to the fluff on a lad's cheeks.

In ghazal poetry the 'Udhrite element has thus been completely alienated from its simple true origin. Ḥāfiẓ was married, but the name of his spouse is not mentioned once throughout his *Dīwān*. In the famous nineteenth century Urdu novel *The Courtesan of Lucknow* by Ruswā, it is 'Udhrite poetry by which the lovers address the heroine of this revealing piece of literature.<sup>57</sup> But let us not talk morality, and instead turn for a few moments to the epic shaping of 'Udhrite love. The role of the tale of Lailā and Majnūn in this respect is well known. Another famous 'Udhrite couple, 'Urwa ibn Ḥizām and 'Afrā', are, with new names, the heroes of one of the earliest romantic epopees in Persian, 'Ayyūqī's *Warqa and Gulshāh*. This epos has an epilogue worth mentioning: After having died of love affliction as in the Arabic tale, the two heroes are resurrected by the Prophet Muḥammad and they then enjoy all the pleasures of love they had been longing for.<sup>58</sup>

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., p. 15.

<sup>55</sup> J. Hell, "Al-'Abbās b. al-Aḥnaf: der Minnesänger am Hof Hārūn al-Rašīds," *Islamica*, 2 (1926), 271-307.

<sup>56</sup> Cf. the discussion of the different kinds of "earthly" love as reflected in mystical poetry in Ritter, *Das Meer der Seele*, pp. 347 f.

<sup>57</sup> English translation by K. Singh and M. A. Husain (London, 1961). A fine German translation of the novel was made by Ursula Rothen-Dubs (Zürich, 1971).

<sup>58</sup> J. Rypka, *History of Iranian Literature*, ed. K. Jahn (Dordrecht, 1968), pp. 177 f.



This leads us to all the tales in which a long 'Udhrite period finally comes to its "happy end." Von Grunebaum has pointed to the similarity between the structure of this kind of sentimental love novel in *The Thousand and One Nights* and in Greek and Hellenistic love novels.<sup>59</sup> He also made mention of 'Unṣurī's epos *Wāmiq and 'Adhrā* and of the fact that the Greek proper names in the few extant fragments of this text clearly prove its Greek origin.<sup>60</sup>

#### FLIRTATION AND ILLICIT LOVE AFFAIRS

Many an egg(-like lady) of the tent, unattainable in her enclosure,  
But I enjoyed myself with her quite leisurely.<sup>61</sup>

Flirtation is, of course, not illicit. Or, at least, was not so in pre-Islamic society. Flirtation did continue in Islamic society, but, in general, under more dangerous conditions than before. Flirtation is no longer officially tolerated, except with slave girls. Since flirtation can lead to fornication, I treat both aspects of love in one section without denying the difference between them.

That flirtation was somewhat easier in pre-Islamic and perhaps also in early Islamic times than it was later on is an idea that one is tempted to gather from reports about such gay rakes as Imru' ul-Qais or 'Umar ibn abi Rabī'a. And this idea is supported by Jāḥiẓ pointing to the fact of girls and women going unveiled and to the unhampered innocent social contacts between the sexes which continued, he says, until the veil was decreed for the women of the Prophet. But this impression may be wrong. At least, we must not forget the dangers inherent in any flirtation that did not conform to the social rules even in pre-Islamic times. Thus, the famous fool of love Qais ibn al-Mulawwaḥ, called Majnūn, as well as his namesake Qais ibn Dhariḥ, and Jamīl were made outlaws by edicts of the Umayyad calif when the families of their beloveds complained about them.<sup>62</sup>

Danger is implied also in the amorous adventures that are featured in so many poems of 'Umar and his like. Sometimes it led to lethal consequences, as in the case of the poet Waḍḍāḥ who paid secret visits to Umm al-Banīn, the wife of Calif

<sup>59</sup> *Da. Islam im Mittelalter*, pp. 389 f.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 585, n. 88. Some recently discovered fragments of 'Unṣurī's epos were edited by Maulavi M. Shafi (Lahore, 1967).

<sup>61</sup> Twenty-second verse of Imri'il-Qais's famous *mu'allāqa* (*Dhakhā'ir al-'Arab* 24, ed. M. Abu l-Faḍl Ibrāhīm [Cairo, 1969], p. 13):

Wa-baiḍati khidrin la yurāmu khibā'uhā  
tamatta'tu min lahwin bihā ghaira mu'jalī.

<sup>62</sup> Jamīl: Aghānī, VIII, 108, 124, 129. Qais ibn Dhariḥ: *ibid.*, IX, 197-198. Majnūn: R. Paret, *Früharabische Liebesgeschichten*, Sprache und Dichtung, Heft 40 (Berne, 1927), nos. 118 and 121.

Walīd I. Having been informed by a servant the calif asked his wife to make him a gift of the very chest in which the poet was hidden. Then he ordered a deep pit dug in the floor of his chamber and said before dropping the strange coffin into the depth: "Something has come to my ears. If it is true, we bury you now after having shrouded you [with this chest] and we bury your memory and obliterate your trace until the last day! But if it is not true, we bury only the wood, which is of no worth!"<sup>63</sup> According to other versions the poet was killed for the mere fact of having addressed Umm al-Banīn in some of his love songs.<sup>64</sup>

'Umar ibn abi Rabī'a was apparently not the man to risk his life for love, although he liked to boast of his courageous adventures. And the same is, of course, true for other poets, too. As a matter of fact, they resorted more than once to a masquerade in order to escape the revenge of the *raqīb* (observer), the *merkuere* of the European *Minnesang*. Once, after having spent too long a night with Nu'm in her tent, 'Umar escaped in the guise of a girl accompanied by Nu'm and two of her sisters.<sup>65</sup> And even Walīd ibn Yazīd, despite being the omnipotent calif, thought it wise to slip into the gown of an olive-monger in order to meet coy Salmā. But, she recognized him and her slave girls told him: "We do not want your oil!"<sup>66</sup>

In our sources the most common circumstance for a young wife's being exposed to temptation and, if the plot so demands, falling victim to it, is the long absence of her husband. He may be either on a commercial trip or, much more often, performing the pilgrimage. This is the background of the *Ṭūfīnāma* frame-tale and of many other stories in this collection as well as in *The Thousand and One Nights* and elsewhere. In the frame-tale of the Turkish *Ṭūfīnāma* we have the paradoxical but, in terms of literary fiction, excellently invented situation that the peacock steadily encourages the young lady to visit her adorer while, in fact, he seeks to prevent her from going astray by telling her one story after the other. In the Persian version the bird ruins his effort by telling the husband on his return of his wife's intention. He immediately kills her.<sup>67</sup> And this—the killing of one's wife on the ground of mere suspicion—occurs in other tales, too. In the Turkish version of the *Ṭūfīnāma*, however, the bloody end is avoided and the couple happily reunited.

Two figures that loom large in flirtation and fornication tales are the ugly but

<sup>63</sup> Aghānī, VI, 225.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid., p. 224.

<sup>65</sup> This episode is described in his first qasida, verses 50 ff. (M. M. 'Abd al-Ḥamīd, *Sharḥ Dīwān 'Umar ibn abī Rabī'a* [Cairo, 1384/1965], p. 99 f.).

<sup>66</sup> Aghānī, I, 28-29.

<sup>67</sup> Georg Rosen, who published an excellent German translation of the Turkish Parrot Book (*Tuti-Nameh: Das Papageienbuch* [Leipzig, 1957] where Rosen's preface to the first edition of 1858 is reprinted) drew attention to this difference as well as to the fact that the image of the woman is mainly negative in the Persian version, whereas the Turkish editor effected some changes in favor of the female character.



stout black slave and the shrewd old woman or nurse. The role of the black slave as a seducer of high-placed ladies who debase themselves before him and willingly suffer even his most brutal acts, is well known from a number of tales in *The Thousand and One Nights* and need not be repeated here in detail. In my view this figure is a symbol of rude sensuality and of how it degrades a human being. The nurse is featured in so many tales of love and wedlock as to make her one of the main dramatis personae in the love theater of the Islamic world. In most cases her role is only instrumental, however, and she does what she does by order of, or out of veneration for, one or both of the loving couple.

In one tale a number of immoral excesses are combined, all of which are performed by the help of and at the same time under the reproaches of the nurse: the wife of a qadi, after having fornicated with many other men, wants to sleep with her own son, and she does so without her son ever becoming aware of her identity. She then kills the first fruit of this union, a boy, and spares the second, taking her into her house as a slave girl after some years. Later, she destroys the marriage of her son and unites him with this girl who is at the same time his daughter and his step-sister, which however he does not know. The tale sounds rather constructed, and it may well be so—as a showy piece of female depravity.<sup>68</sup>

To outwit observers or, if the sweetheart is married, to cheat the husband is one of the triumphs of illicit love affairs. Countless are the tales of how unloved husbands were duped by a cunning wife and her lover. Seldom, however, is the triumph of cheating more exuberant than in a short story told by Ibn al-Jauzī, but probably of earlier origin, one of those pointed anecdotes in which Arabic wit reaches its peak: A lover demanded that his sweetheart make love to him under the eyes of her husband, or he would leave her. She promised to comply. On the day fixed she climbed up a palm tree saying that she was going to pluck dates. But sitting above she started crying and scolding her husband: "You rake, you scoundrel. Who is that woman with you? Are you not ashamed to fornicate with her under my eyes?" The man swore holy oaths that he was alone, but his wife insisted. Finally, she came down and he climbed up. But no sooner had he done so than the wife beckoned her lover. And the husband on beholding what he beheld said to her from above: My dear [though I see you fornicating with a foreigner as you said you saw me with another woman] nothing of what you have reproached me with is true in either case; because from up in this tree everybody sees what you saw!"<sup>69</sup>

That half the fun of an illicit flirtation may lie just in its being illicit is the moral of a pointed anecdote told about the poet Farazdaq. Once he wanted to seduce a woman of rank and threatened to compromise her by a satire if she would not

<sup>68</sup> Weisweiler, no. 117, after a story in the *Nihāyat al-Arab* of an-Nuwairī.

<sup>69</sup> Ibn al-Jauzī, *Al-Adhkiyā'* (Cairo, 1306/1889), p. 78. An almost identical version of this anecdote, but with Greek names, is contained in the ninth tale of the seventh day in Boccaccio's *Decameron*.

comply with his wishes. She, however, informed the poet's wife who laid a trap for him which ended with him in what he thought was an adulterous bed whereas the woman he slept with in the dark room was his own wife. Having discovered the fraud he cried: "So it was you! Praise be to God! How sweet you are when forbidden, and how disgusting when allowed!"<sup>70</sup>

Various stratagems of cheating may provide sufficient stuff for long novels such as the Arabic story of Qamar az-zamān and the jeweler's wife which, according to von Grunebaum, is an Arabic adaptation of Plautus' comedy *Miles gloriosus*, or the Persian epos *Wīs and Rāmīn*, the alleged ancestor of the medieval European sagas of *Tristan and Isolt*.<sup>71</sup> There is a vast gap between the anecdote of the magical palm tree and the epos *Wīs and Rāmīn*, reminding us that the moral aspect of illicit affairs may vary from an unscrupulous Don Juan-like attitude to a relation of true love driven into illegality by the force of fate and circumstance. With all its infringements of the laws of society and religion which neither the author nor the loving couple deny, the union of Wīs and Rāmīn is legitimized by virtue of the right of nature and the right of the heart, whereas what King Moubad thinks is his legal claim is shown by the author to be unnatural and heartless. It is true that when the nurse succeeds in persuading Wīs to see Rāmīn, the author talks of the success of Iblīs (Satan).<sup>72</sup> On the other hand, when Moubad almost kills Wīs after she candidly confessed to her love for Rāmīn, Gurgānī comments: "Since God purposed good to her, how could the king have disgracefully taken her life?"<sup>73</sup> In some way the constellation of the three protagonists in Gurgānī's epos is an illustration of the later Persian love ghazal, where true love, inspiration, life joy and humanism is contrasted with orthodoxy and legalism, or, to use the briefest code possible, *eros* stands against *ratio*.<sup>74</sup> The enamored Rāmīn who loves wine and sings and plays the lute is what Rūmī, Ḥāfiẓ, and so many other Persian poets would call a "*rind*," whereas Moubad appears as the cold incarnation of power, law, and reason. This seems even to be indicated by their names; Moubad is "the priest" (of Zoroastrianism), Rāmīn is derived from *rām*, a form often used by Gurgānī instead of Rāmīn and meaning "mild" or "hilarious".

<sup>70</sup> Aghānī, XIX, 34.

<sup>71</sup> The existing parallels do not, however, outweigh the existing differences. The possibilities of Oriental influence in medieval European literature have often been overestimated. Cf. the skeptical remarks concerning the alleged Oriental influences in the *Parzival* of Wolfram made by M. Plessner, *Medium Aevum*, Vol. 36 (Oxford, 1967), pp. 253-266.

<sup>72</sup> Gurgānī, *Wīs u Rāmīn*, ed. K. S. Aini (Tehran, 1970), p. 148, line 142 (hereafter Persian translation); English translation by George Morrison, *Wīs and Rāmīn* (New York: Columbia University Press, p. 98 (hereafter Morrison).

<sup>73</sup> Morrison, p. 119.

<sup>74</sup> Cf. my essay "Verstand und Liebe bei Hafis" in my *Drei Hafis-Studien*, Europäische Hochschulschriften I, 113 (Berne and Frankfurt on the Main, 1975).



But the voice of orthodoxy did not remain silent. The theologians would say: "None of the poets sinned more against God in his verses than did 'Umar."<sup>75</sup> A stern comment upon immoral stories attached to the names of califs and other respectable persons is made by Ibn Khaldūn in his famous *Muqaddimah*. After having told a number of tales, among them that of Calif al-Ma'mūn visiting his later wife Būrān, daughter of his secretary al-Ḥasan ibn Sahl, by means of a basket let down from the roof, he concludes by asking the reader:

How does all this accord with al-Ma'mūn's well-known religion and learning, with his imitation of the way of life of his forefathers, the right-guided [Abbāssid] calif, with his adoption of the way of life of those pillars of Islam, the [first] four califs, with his respect for the religious scholars or his observance in his prayers and legal practice of the norm established by God. How could it be correct that he would act like [one of those] wicked scoundrels who amuse themselves by rambling about at night entering strange houses in the dark, and engaging in nocturnal trysts in the manner of Bedouin lovers! And how does that story fit with the position and noble character of al-Ḥasan ibn Sahl's daughter, and with the firm morality and chastity that reigned in her father's house!

And he concludes:

There are many such stories. They are always cropping up in the works of historians. The incentive for inventing and reporting them is a [general] inclination to forbidden pleasures and for snaring the reputation of others. People justify their own subservience to pleasure by citing men and women of the past [who allegedly did the same things they are doing]."<sup>76</sup>

We do not quite understand why Ibn Khaldūn took so much offense in a story which, to our feeling, is but the innocent, though capricious, overture of a happy union sanctioned by matrimonial bonds. Was he always so disapproving? At any rate, when he wrote those moralizing lines he could have consoled himself with many a stern story suited for curing the reader of all flirtatious ideas.

In his *Battlefields of the Loving* Ibn as-Sarrāj has a number of stories in which a planned amorous adventure is detected by the husband or nipped in the bud by a courageous girl or woman and the imprudent and impudent intruder has to pay for his rashness sometimes with his life, sometimes with castration or other cruel punishment. Nearly all his stories on illicit love affairs result sooner or later in failure, and where the culprit is killed, the author as a rule concludes by saying that the calif absolved the murderer from paying the blood money.<sup>77</sup>

<sup>75</sup> Ibn 'Abd Rabbih, *Al-'Iqd al-farid*, 7 vols. (Cairo, 1948-1953), V, 385.

<sup>76</sup> *The Muqaddimah: An Introduction to History*, trans. from the Arabic by Franz Rosenthal, Bollingen Series XLIII (2d. ed.; Princeton, 1967), I, 39-40.

<sup>77</sup> Paret, *Frühharabische Liebesgeschichten*, nos. 61, 64, 68a, 68b, and 70.

To conclude this section let us listen to a comment of Wīs on the fate of an “unlucky woman fallen in the snare”:

Unlucky woman, fallen in the snare! Cursed with shame and her good name sacrificed! The wretched woman laid low, the man riding high, the bow of arrogance drawn against the woman! The faithless man does not bear her mercy nor feel compunction about her, so inhuman is he. He does not practice love, feels no regret; does not speak fair or reckon with her shame. The woman, in her hope, melts at the sting of hope like snow in the heat of the sun. In love she is like a wounded wild ass, heart and soul bound by seal and fetter; now she is afraid of her husband, now of her family; now wastes in fear and shame before God; on the one hand, shame and humiliation without end; on the other, Hellfire below her!<sup>78</sup>

Wīs did not finally fall victim to the fate she deplores in these words, but countless other women did, and not only in the Islamic world. Her accusation of the heartlessness of men is echoed in the following words of Mrs. Arbuthnot, Oscar Wilde’s “Woman of No Importance” in late nineteenth century England: “I am disgraced. He is not. That is all. It is the usual history of a man and a woman as it usually happens, as it always happens. And the ending is the ordinary ending. The woman suffers. The man goes free.”<sup>79</sup> Fortunately, there are and have always been some exceptions to this. But the great difference between the Islamic and the Christian situation is that, apart from his legal wife or wives, a Muslim was allowed to have intercourse with “the slaves whom ye have acquired” (Koran, Sura 4:3; 4:24), “women from the bazaar,” to repeat the expression of the *Qābūsnāma*, without losing his good conscience and his image of a devoted man.

#### RELATION TO SLAVE GIRLS

And those under thy control from among prisoners of war.<sup>80</sup>

To abduct a girl or a woman during a raid, to take them as prey from a defeated tribe, or to buy them from the bazaar was common practice in pre-Islamic Arabia. Islam brought no essential change in these customs. After the massacre of the Jewish tribe of Quraiza, when between six hundred and nine hundred male Jews were decapitated, their women and children were sold and Muḥammad chose for his own service the beautiful Raiḥāna.<sup>81</sup> Thus, there was

<sup>78</sup> Morrison, p. 90; Persian text, p. 137.

<sup>79</sup> Oscar Wilde, *Plays* (Penguin Books, 1954), p. 133.

<sup>80</sup> Koran, Sura 33:50.

<sup>81</sup> F. Buhl, *Muhammads Liv* (Copenhagen, 1903), p. 270.



not the least flaw for a pious man in possessing and enjoying slave girls. But we must quote here the criticism of the skeptical blind poet of tenth-century Mesopotamia, Abū l-'Alā' al-Ma'arrī, who said in one of his meditations:

What feuds between us hath religion twined  
And given us o'er to hates of every kind!  
Did not a prophet's ordinance bestow  
On Arab lords the women of their foe?<sup>82</sup>

Trading in slave girls and of course, in male slaves too, must have been a very profitable business, to judge from the prices some of them fetched.<sup>83</sup> Slave girls were also a very favorite present within the circles who could afford them and sometimes a calif or a vizier might demonstrate his generosity by donating a precious girl to a favorite or—happiest of all cases—to her true lover, as is testified by a large number of tales. If the recipient was not her lover, he might be an old ugly fool like the poet and court jester Abu Dulāma. Already senile, he asked Khaizurān, the wife of Calif al-Mahdī, for such a present and got one; and when his wife gave her to his son, he complained about it before al-Mahdī and got a second one.<sup>84</sup>

Stories about slave girls given as gifts to strangers are, in fact, highly outnumbered by tales about donations made for the sake of the happy union between a slave girl and her lover.<sup>85</sup> In one of these tales which crops up in Tanūkhī's famous "Ease after Trouble" (or rendered more freely "Every Cloud Has a Silver Lining"), the feeling of slave girls is expressed in a moving way most uncommon in this type of story. When one of the girls prepares for being conveyed to her lover, the others, sharing her joy, say to her: "You are released, your yearning has been fulfilled!"<sup>86</sup>

Here are only two more examples of tales about live gifts. The first is of high importance in and for the literary history of Persia: The prince of Darband sent a Kiptchak slave girl to the great poet Nizāmī in acknowledgment of his first epic poem, and Nizāmī so ardently loved her that he not only made her his legal spouse and bitterly bewailed her premature death, but also set her a singular

<sup>82</sup> R. A. Nicholson, *Studies in Islamic Poetry* (Cambridge, 1921), no. 272:

Inna sh-sharā'ī'a alqat bainanā iḥanā  
wa-auda'atnā afānīna l-'adawāti  
wa-hal ubīḥat nisā'u l-qaumi 'an 'uruḍin  
lil-'urbi illā bi-aḥkāmi n-nubūwāti.

<sup>83</sup> Several examples in *The Thousand and One Nights*.

<sup>84</sup> Aghānī, IX, 134 = Weisweiler, no. 69.

<sup>85</sup> Examples in Weisweiler, nos. 33, 36, 47, 76, 77, 94, 101, and 102.

<sup>86</sup> Al-Qāḍī at-Tanūkhī, *Al-Faraj ba'd ash-shidda* (Cairo, 1357/1938), II, 165-167 = Weisweiler, no. 101.

monument in the incomparably beautiful and lofty-minded Shīrīn of his second epos *Khusrou and Shīrīn*, one of the greatest female figures created in Islamic literature.<sup>87</sup> The other example is relevant in a completely different context, that of the comparative history of religion. The heroes of this little story are Calif Manşūr and the Christian court physician George from the famous Bukhtīshū' family. On learning that the physician's wife was ill and had therefore remained behind in Gondeshapur, the calif sent the physician three choice Byzantine slave girls as a present for Christmas. George was outraged and immediately sent them back. When the calif asked him why he had not accepted the present, he said: "We Christians have only one wife and as long as she is alive we don't take another!"<sup>88</sup>

A special class of slave girl was the singing girl (*qaina*, pl. *qiyān*), on whose beauty and frivolity Jāḥiẓ wrote the treatise mentioned above. The main point Jāḥiẓ makes in it is the legality of "our gatherings" (*majālisunā*).<sup>89</sup>

In the same way that one is allowed to look at a cornfield or a flower-bed, enjoying its green and breathing in its various odors so long as he does not stretch out his hand for it, but is not allowed to stretch out his hand for a single grain of mustard seed without right to it, as he is not allowed to eat something that is forbidden, so is one allowed to talk to the singing girls, to joke, flirt, and shake hands with them, and to touch them in order to turn them around as long as nothing illicit is involved in it. Did not Allah himself except *al-lamam*, "the lesser offenses," when he said: "Those who avoid the heinous things and indecencies, save lesser offenses—surely thy lord is wide in his forgiveness" (Sura 53:32, Arberry's translation).

Jāḥiẓ then puts forward a number of interpretations of what *lamam* may mean, including kissing or, if I may use the expression, "petting."<sup>90</sup>

<sup>87</sup> E. Bertels, *Izbrannye Trudy: Nizami i Fuzuli* (Moscow, 1962), pp. 118-119: "I am inclined to believe that all those scenes in Khosrou and Shirin in which Shirin refuses to become the concubine of Khosrou, only agreeing to a legal wedlock, are more or less related to Apak." And p. 228: "The true heroine of the poem is, of course, Shirin... Khosrou plays largely a merely passive role. It is necessary to state that the poem was composed in the twelfth century in a Muslim country where woman was regarded as a toy, a ware liable to be bought and sold. It needed much courage to distribute the roles in this way." Though evidenced by countless tales, this statement of Bertel's is somewhat one-sided. At least, we have to remember the hadith that recommends educating and teaching a slave girl as much as possible, and in case she develops well, bestowing freedom upon her and marrying her; he who does this will gain the double reward (*Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, VII, 6, Kitāb an-nikāḥ, bāb 13). As a pious Muslim, Nizāmī may well have been aware that his wish to marry Apak was not only in accordance with his heart and his human feeling but with the holy tradition as well.

<sup>88</sup> *Uyūn al-anbā'*, I, 124.

<sup>89</sup> *Rasā'il*, II, 146: "In this book we have written down arguments against those who vituperate us for possessing *qiyān*."

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, II, 164: *al-iyān fīmā dūn al-farj*.



All this is, of course, not directed toward a possessor of *qiyân*, who has the right to use them as concubines anyhow, but to those who attend their concerts and are *marbûṭ*, attached to one of them without being her owner. How a *qaina* handles her *marbûṭ*, or rather *marbūṭīn*, because usually she has a number of them simultaneously, is poignantly described by Jāḥiẓ. To quote it here in full is beyond the scope of this paper but the following lines serve as an example:

As a rule, they are not honest, making use of tricks and treachery to filch what the *marbûṭ* has in his pocket. Sometimes three or four of her *marbūṭīn* gather in her dwelling, each of them being, however, on guard not to meet one of his rival (or rivals) and staring at them jealously if they happen to meet. She on her part weeps with one eye to one and laughs with the other eye to the other, twinkles at this one behind that one's back, bestows her love on one in secret and on the other in public, making him (or perhaps both of them) believe that she belongs to him alone, her public demeanor being the opposite of her inner feeling. And on their leaving her, she writes a letter to each of them after one and the same pattern, assuring him that she is sick of his rivals and only craves for an intimate meeting with him. Yes, had Iblīs no other snare to kill with, no other banner to which to call, and no other seduction with which to enthrall us than the singing girls, they would completely suffice him. Yet this is no reproach of them, but on the contrary the highest praise, because a statement of the Prophet says: "The best amongst your women are the enchanting ravishing ones!"<sup>91</sup>

Still more revealing than this pretty passage is the final part of the treatise, in which the author gives an engaging description of the advantages of possessing *qiyân*. A man who possesses *qiyân* enjoys privileges similar only to those of the calif. Visitors willingly accept his invitations, bringing along precious presents. High-placed persons of great wealth and influence lend him money and protection, and so on. He, on his part, keeps open house, knows the particular predilections of each of his guests, and cares as much to satisfy their cravings as he does not care whether the doors of his house are closed during the night and whether a *qaina* spent it at home or elsewhere.<sup>92</sup> In other words, notwithstanding all the religious arguments in the first part of the treatise, what Jāḥiẓ describes at the end of it is a "maison de passe" if not simply an upper class brothel.

That there were other brothels, too, should be expected, it being in the nature of things, or rather of man. But as I am not a specialist in this field I ask you to be content with one example of the classical period. 'Aḍud ad-Daula, the famous tenth century Buyid dynast, instituted a brothel in Baghdad and, according to a remark in Bīrūnī's *India*, he did it with two aims in view: to improve his revenues

<sup>91</sup> Ibid., p. 175.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid., pp. 177-180.

and to "protect his subjects against the passions of his unmarried soldiers."<sup>93</sup> 'Aḡud ad-Daula is also famous for another story involving a slave girl. According to a report in the *Tajārib al-umam* (Experiences of Nations) the prince once developed a passion for an odalisk which grew so ardent as to impede him in the fulfillment of his royal duties. When he became conscious of the dangers arising from this passion, and realized that he could not get over it, he ordered the eunuch Shakkar to drown her in the Tigris. The eunuch did not comply with his order immediately so that a few days later, when the prince regretted it, Shakkar gave her back to him and he was happy to have her again. His passion, however, was the same as before and he soon repeated his order, saying: "To satisfy the soul's craving for its carnal desire is not worth giving up the world and corrupting one's control over it."<sup>94</sup>

A remark added to this report says it is a story told of a number of sovereigns. I am afraid, though, this probably does not mean that it is not true but that it happened more than once. At least, it is quite in line with other brutal acts of 'Aḡud ad-Daula and many of his princely mates.<sup>95</sup> Moreover, it is reminiscent of the punishment of odalisks who, having been detected in flagrante delicto—and sometimes on mere suspicion—were killed or, in the Osmanic period, drowned in the Golden Horn and other appropriate waters, as one may read in famous pieces of oriental literature of the European romantic epoch such as Byron's *Don Juan* and Morier's *Adventures of Hadji Baba of Isfahan*.<sup>96</sup>

#### WIDLOCK AND MATRIMONIAL LOVE

Your Wives are your field:  
Go in, therefore, to your field as ye will;  
but do first some act for your soul's good:  
and fear ye God...<sup>97</sup>

How are marriage and matrimonial life reflected in literary writing? If we look at European and American literature we may easily state that adultery, free love, and lecherous adventures have always formed the vast majority of erotic subjects

<sup>93</sup> *Bīrūnī's India*, trans. E. Sachau (London, 1910), II, 157.

<sup>94</sup> *The Eclipse of the Abbasid Caliphate*, ed. D. S. Margoliouth (London, 1920-1921), III, 42.

<sup>95</sup> Cf. my sketch of this prince's character in my book *Die Hofkorrespondenz 'Aḡud ad-Daulas und ihr Verhältnis zu anderen historischen Quellen der frühen Būyiden* (Wiesbaden, 1965), esp. p. 18.

<sup>96</sup> Byron, *Don Juan*, Canto the Fifth, stanzas 92 and 149; James Morier, *The Adventures of Hadji Baba of Isfahan*, The World's Classics 238 (London: Oxford University Press, 1923 and many later reprints), pp. 161-162.

<sup>97</sup> Koran, Sura 2:223.



and still do. If a true and constant love is depicted, the story usually ends either with death or with the happy union. "Mit dem Gürtel, mit dem Schleier reisst der schöne Wahn entzwei," said Friedrich Schiller in *The Bell*. And the frivolous Lord Illingworth in Oscar Wilde's drama *A Woman of No Importance* states: "One should always be in love. That is the reason one should never marry!"<sup>98</sup> Matrimony is either happy or everyday drudgery. Both cases (which sometimes may melt into one) are not favorite topics of artistic narration. For matrimony to become a subject worthy of the interest of storywriters (and of their readers), it is necessary that it be full of problems, tensions, and adventures. Whereas in real life we usually strive for constant happiness, in fiction we prefer problems; we like the happy end, but not the happy state.

The problems of matrimonial life in early Islam are more or less the same as everywhere: separation, appearance of a third figure, lack of harmony, lack of money, and so on. Additional problems might arise from the particular conditions and customs of Islamic society in the past: lack of free choice of the partner, polygamy, prerogatives of the male, practice of divorce. It would be a rewarding task to trace the particular Islamic patterns of matrimonial love and life in the sources but this must be the endeavor of a long and far-reaching research and cannot be done here. The impressionistic style to which I have been clinging until now is, therefore, even more manifest in this last section.

There are a number of early tales in which a father or mother of a girl does not give her away to a wooer without having asked her consent.<sup>99</sup> Yet, in a famous tale of *The Thousand and One Nights*, it is Parī Bānū, the fairy, who gives the following answer to the marriage proposal of her earthly lover Prince Aḥmad:

I have told thee already that in this manner I act with fullest authority. Besides all this, there is a custom and immemorial usage with us fairy-folk that, when we maidens come to marriageable age and to years of understanding, each one may wed according to the dictates of her heart the person that pleaseth her most and whom she judgeth likely to make her days happy. Thus wife and husband live with each other all their lives in harmony and happiness. But if a girl be given away in marriage by the parents, according to their choice and not hers, and she be mated to a helpmate unmeet for her, because ill-shapen or ill-conditioned or unfit to win her affection, then are the twain likely to be at odds each with the other for the rest of their days; and endless troubles result for them from such ill-sorted union. Nor are we bound by another law which bindeth modest virgins of the

<sup>98</sup> Wilde, *Plays*, p. 117.

<sup>99</sup> Some examples in Weisweiler: nos. 18 (pre-Islamic), 40, and 42 (earliest period of Islam).

race of Adam; for we freely announce our preference to those we love, nor must we wait and pine to be wooed and won."<sup>100</sup>

The essence of these words is a main motive of *Wīs* and *Rāmīn*. After having told how *Shahrū*, the queen of *Māh* or *Media*, promised her unborn daughter to King *Moubad*, the poet summarizes his opinion in the words: "See into what tribulation they fell by giving away an unborn child as a bride."<sup>101</sup>

In what difficulties the custom could result is illustrated in a story in the Turkish *Tūfīnāma*. When the father of pretty *Jamīla* took off for the pilgrimage he told his wife and his son that since *Jamīla* was, thanks to God, marriageable and he was not sure of his return, they should give her away as soon as a suitable wooer appeared. A little later the son also went away on merchandising affairs. And now the inevitable happened: Father, mother, and brother promised the bride to different suitors, each of whom soon found himself in the same predicament of having two rivals. Poor *Jamīla*, however, who had not been consulted and who apparently did not like any of the three, decided to die. But that is not the end of the story. When the three men were bewailing her death in the graveyard, one of them was overcome by his craving to see her for the last time and dug out her corpse; the second, a physician, discerned that she was not really dead and could be roused by a few vehement blows, which were dealt her by the third one. No sooner had she recovered than the struggle among the three rivals broke out again, and this time, having learned that it was not so easy to die right away, *Jamīla* chose to escape her adorers by becoming a nun.<sup>102</sup> Usually the young people seem to have complied with the decisions of their parents without much resistance.<sup>103</sup> In one tale a governor of Baghdad, who is alarmed by information about the debaucheries of the daughters of former high functionaries, decides to prevent his five daughters from such aberrations by marrying them on the spot to the sons of a gentleman, whereupon the five unwilling wooers and their father are called and the five marriages concluded before sunrise.<sup>104</sup> Here, as in so many other stories, the only prerequisite looked for is, not love, but social equality, the role of which we already noticed in the discussion of 'Udhrite love.

As a rule it was thus on the wedding night, that the two spouses would behold each other for the first time. A nurse could be sent in advance to the girl's house

<sup>100</sup> Richard F. Burton, trans., *Supplemental Nights to the Book of the Thousand Nights and a Night* (London, 1886), IV, 447.

<sup>101</sup> Morrison, p. 25.

<sup>102</sup> Nineteenth night, second story in the Turkish Parrot Book, Rosen's German translation, pp. 230-235.

<sup>103</sup> A typical example is Weisweiler, no. 56: A *qāḍī* of Marw marries his daughter to his pious Indian servant (after Ghazzālī, *Al-Tibr al-musbūk* ([Cairo, n.d.], pp. 154-156).

<sup>104</sup> Al-Qāḍī Abū 'Alī al-Muḥassin at-Tanūkhī, *Al-Faraj ba'd ash-shidda*, II, 68 f. = Weisweiler, no. 92.



to inspect her physical qualities. In a case where this task is entrusted to a slave girl the young Bedouin bride salvages her pride by slapping the girl on the face.<sup>105</sup> Wedding ceremonies are often sumptuous undertakings, such as the one described in the fairy tale of the two viziers Nūr ad-Dīn and Shams ad-Dīn in which ceremony the presentation of the bride in seven precious gowns of different colors successively is the most prominent episode.<sup>106</sup> In this description an old wife is mentioned as attending the bride up to the door of the bridal chamber. This old wife might also be charged with watching the couple on their wedding night by spying through a peephole to make sure the young man has succeeded in fulfilling his nuptial duties.<sup>107</sup> Since the act of copulation is sometimes described by means of poetic metaphors, let us, therefore, instead of peeping with the old wife through the keyhole, listen to a few lines from the masterly pen of Nizāmī to appreciate the nobility of this kind of "outspokenness."

Thus he told his enamouring tale;  
and the lovely one listened affectionately.  
When she noticed that the king had got into the mood of an untamable horse,  
she let him embrace his lily-scented cypress.  
A nightingale sat down on the throne of the bud;  
the bud opened and intoxicated the nightingale.  
A peacock beheld a tray filled with sugar  
and scattered his sugar undisturbed by flies.  
He cast a fish into the basin  
and a date into the milk.  
It was sweet and marvelously rich,  
but he made it still sweeter by his date.  
The king removed the silk from the Chinese picture  
and opened the golden lock of the sugar-chest.<sup>108</sup>

The image of the married woman as it emerges from the sources is not homogeneous and, therefore, not one-sided either. There are positive as well as negative statements and tales about her character. One should keep in mind that some of the most acid of them are of non-Islamic origin. For example, the Arabic

<sup>105</sup> Aghānī, XI, 89 = Weisweiler, no. 44.

<sup>106</sup> *The Thousand and One Nights*, German version by E. Littmann, *Die Erzählungen aus den 1001 Nächten* (Wiesbaden, 1953), I, 246-255 (hereafter Littmann).

<sup>107</sup> This is prettily described in a chapter on marriage customs in the book *Hayal ve Gerçek* (Fantasy and Reality) (Istanbul, 1957) by the Turkish author Mahmud Makal who worked as a village teacher in eastern Anatolia and published two volumes of his experiences there, the other entitled *Bizim Köy* (Our Village) (Istanbul, 1957). Both volumes became famous and the author was furiously attacked for having fouled his own nest.

<sup>108</sup> *Heft Peiker*, ed. H. Ritter and J. Rypka, *Monografie Archivu Orientalniho*, Vol. III (Prague, Paris, Leipzig, 1934), p. 163.

biographies of Socrates which had been transmitted to the Arabs by Christian monks contain such statements as this:

No evil is worse than foolishness and no malignancy more malignant than a woman.

Whoever wants to escape the machinations of Satan must not obey a woman, because women are an erected ladder, and Satan cannot perform any of his ruses without climbing up one of them.

Keep your affairs with them like you do with carcasses. Eat of them only if need forces you and as much as keeps you alive. But if you eat more than necessary they make you sick and kill you.

Somebody said to him: How do you vituperate women though neither you nor your like among the wise men could exist without them? He said: Women are like palm trees with their capsules. When these enter a man's body they kill him but their fruit is the delicious date.<sup>109</sup>

It would be easy to enumerate further examples of such sayings of an alleged or true Greek origin. But let us instead add a few examples from Persian sources. Some of the spiteful verdicts on women Firdausī puts forward in his *Book of Kings* are probably also influenced by pre-Islamic sources:

As soon as she has borne you a good child,  
detach your heart from the love of your wife.

or,

If you want to praise women, prefer to praise dogs,  
because one dog is better than a hundred virtuous women.  
How aptly did the world's Lord Qaiqubad say:  
An ugly curse be on the beautiful woman!

The inventory of such verses and statements in Persian poetry is endless. Khâqânī says:

A thousand evils rise from one woman;  
imagine then, how many would rise from a dozen or a hundred!

Sa'dī gives the following advice:

Take a new wife every year, O friend!  
No good is it using a calendar at its end.

<sup>109</sup> 'Uyūn al-anbā', I, 49.



And even the wise and human Nizāmī has some unfriendly remarks on the topic:

Don't beat a woman, but if she opposes you, then  
beat her so much that she will never rise again.<sup>110</sup>

Some of these lines seem to be gross exaggerations. I must, however, warn the reader not to be too rash in taking these statements and their like at face value. As I was not able to check them in their context I doubt whether all of them really express the opinion of the respective poets.<sup>111</sup> From Gurgānī's *Wis and Rāmīn* we might gather the most contradictory statements about women and love, as they are put in the mouths of the protagonists of the story and reflect their personal opinions which can, of necessity, only partly accord with that of the author himself.

All these statements seem to be more or less inspired by irrational animosity. But they do not reflect the Koranic attitude on women, notwithstanding the clear prevalence and privileges it gives to the male. Closer to the Koranic position is a Jewish tradition quoted by Jāḥiẓ in his great *Book of Animals*. According to this tradition Eve, Adam, and the snake were punished after the Fall each by the imposition of natural qualities, Eve's being menstruation, defloration, pregnancy, labor pains, delivery, childbed, the veiling of her head, being kept in the house, being under her husband's direction, lying beneath the man during the act of copulation.<sup>112</sup> To these general and partly quite unqualified statements can be added the more detailed pictures of individual representatives of the tender sex. We may think here of the short vivid satire the poet 'Abdallāh ibn Aufā has rhymed about his wife, beginning with the words:

I married the daughter of al-Muntaṣar  
Unwillingly, which brought me damage and no avail!

And then he describes her as a quarrelsome, lying, gluttonous female and sums up with the line:

O what a nuisance is a wife, no matter whether she be  
the single mate of a man or the fourth of his quartette.<sup>113</sup>

The poem reminds us of the fate of another poet, called aḍ-Ḍaḥḥāk, whose story has already been mentioned by Professor Rosenthal but may be repeated here in brief. Having been told by the governor al-Ḥajjāj ibn Yūsuf that a man's happiness was not complete unless he had the four spouses in his harem, Ḍaḥḥāk spent a

<sup>110</sup> These verses are quoted in K. Timm and S. Aalami, *Die muslimische Frau zwischen Tradition und Fortschritt*, Veröffentlichungen des Museums für Völkerkunde zu Leipzig, Heft 29 (Berlin, 1976), pp. 223-224; the quotations are taken from an unpublished collection of misogynist statements in Persian poetry made by my venerated friend M. A. Djamalzadeh.

<sup>111</sup> Aalami does not raise this question.

<sup>112</sup> *Kitāb al-Ḥayawān*, ed. A. H. Hārūn (Cairo, 1357/1938), IV, 99.

<sup>113</sup> *Ḥamāsut Abi Tammām*, ed. G. G. Freytag (Bonn, 1828-1847) I, 668.

large fortune in order to attain it. But of the four wives he married the first was impious, the second a simple whore, the third displayed her charms like a male, and the fourth was an obvious fool. The poet, therefore, divorced them as quickly as he had married them, wrote a satire on the event and appeared again before the governor, who, immensely amused by the story, gave him twice as much as he had spent on the adventure.<sup>114</sup>

Aufā's last line is echoed in Ḍaḥḥāk's poem by the wish:

Would that I were deaf and blind, but without wife!

This is the motif of misogyny, which is developed in a more pleasant way in a number of stories which tell how a confirmed bachelor or a misogynist is converted to marriage. Two outstanding examples are the story of the second or Byzantine princess in Niẓāmī's *Haft Paikar* and that of the seventh princess (in the white cupola) in Amīr Khusrou Dihlawī's *Hasht Bihisht*. But space does not permit expounding this topic in detail. I only mention that Abū Nuwās expressly stated that he did not like females because of their impurity and preferred, therefore, to love boys.<sup>115</sup> Love of boys was widely practiced, often side by side with heterosexual relations as did Abū Nuwās. But let us return to our topic.

The fair counterpart of the kind of female who may inspire misogyny is the ideal woman who is as beautiful, charming, and affectionate as she is intelligent, faithful, and brave. Examples of women who incorporate all these qualities are rare, but not totally absent. Three famous ones are Wīs in Gurgāni's *Wīs and Rāmīn*, Shīrīn in Niẓāmī's *Khusrou and Shīrīn*, and Marḥūma or Marjūma in a fine and famous tale which first appeared in 'Aḥḥār's *Ilāhīnāma* and later in *The Thousand and One Nights*, the *Ṭūfīnāma*, and in still other sources. Marḥūma's lot and her withstanding the test are the most remarkable instances of matrimonial faithfulness. She is a bourgeois woman whereas Wīs and Shīrīn are noblewomen; she is placed in a Muslim milieu, her tribulations taking place during the pilgrimage of her husband; and she is exposed to the gravest afflictions by far, including stoning, without giving in to the advances and temptations of those enthralled by her beauty.<sup>116</sup>

The happy counterpart of this lofty but tragic figure is found in a number of stories telling of a successful stratagem by which the heroine dupes her would-be seducers. In the *Ṭūfīnāma* version an Indian prince plans to prove to one of his soldiers who believes in the faithfulness of his wife that she is as treacherous as the rest. He therefore sends two seducers to her successively. But she first makes them hide in a wardrobe, clothed in the servant gowns they had put on by her order, then locks them in, and finally presents them to the astounded prince and

<sup>114</sup> Weisweiler, no. 246, after al-Qālī, *Amālī Dhail* (Cairo, 1344/1926), p. 47.

<sup>115</sup> E. Wagner, *Abū Nuwās: Eine Studie zur arabischen Literatur der frühen Abassidenzeit*, Akademie der Wissenschaften und der Literatur, Veröffentlichungen der Orientalischen Kommission, Band XVII (Mainz, 1965), p. 175.

<sup>116</sup> Cf. Ritter, *Das Meer der Seele*, pp. 353-356.



the highly pleased husband.<sup>117</sup> In an enlarged form, with four or five seducers instead of two, all high-ranking officials, to whom she applies for help and whom she enthralls by her beauty, the same story crops up in the compilation *al-Maḥāsin wal-aḍḍād* (Virtues and Vices) already mentioned above and in *The Thousand and One Nights*. Each of the three stories is highly comical and well-suited for the plot of an oriental opera. The moral point, however, is less clear in the Pseudo-Jāḥiẓ compilation, where the woman is a widow, and it is spoiled in *The Thousand and One Nights* by the wife's being presented as having an adulterous relation with a young man during a long absence of her husband. This may be a later addition, though, easily explained by the fact that the story, here, serves one of the Seven Viziers or Sages as an example to prove "the ruses of women."<sup>118</sup>

It is remarkable that the greatest incarnations of constant love and matrimonial faith in Islamic literature are women, if we disregard the 'Udhrite lovers, who, however, do not as a rule attain the aim of their love.

As a matter of fact, all the great figures of love in our sources are couples. Trivial as this statement may seem, it is of high importance within a society accepting polygamy, because it means that despite the permissibility and practice of polygamous relations the idea of true love was, as a rule, associated with a monogamous relation. It is also a fact, though, that most of the great couples whose names became symbols of true love are of pre-Islamic origin: Wīs and Rāmīn, Khusrou and Shīrīn, Yūsuf and Zulaikhā, Solomon and Bilqīs, the queen of Sheba. Famous Arabic couples such as Lailā and Majnūn and Jamīl and Buthaina are of early Islamic origin and belong to the 'Udhrite family of lovers. The only outstanding couple of later origin, Maḥmūd and his slave Ayāz (tenth century) represent a homoerotic relation which soon became a famous symbol of mystical love.<sup>119</sup>

Wīs and Rāmīn's mutual love is a lifelong passion. They risk their lives under the constant persecution of King Moubad, they deceive him mightily but he deserved no better. Rāmīn has a short affair with Queen Gul during a forced separation from Wīs but soon enough returns to her willingly. And after the death of Moubad they marry and remain a happy couple, their love lasting through all eternity. The same more or less is true of Khusrou and Shīrīn. Again in this epos the monogamous ethos is stronger on the part of the woman, a fact that is stressed by Niẓāmī's introducing an intermezzo of tender 'Udhrite love between Farhād and Shīrīn. She withstands this temptation, while Khusrou is having his various liaisons. With her pure strong love for Khusrou, Shīrīn finally succeeds in purifying his love for her. It is true that the end of this story is tragic, but only on the surface. Khusrou is defeated politically, but in the moral sphere, the sphere of

<sup>117</sup> Turkish *Ṭūfānāma*, first tale of the seventh night, *The Thousand and One Nights*, Littmann, IV, 319; Pseudo-Jāḥiẓ, *al-Maḥāsin wal-aḍḍād*, ed. van Vloten, pp. 263-267 = Weisweiler, no. 45.

<sup>118</sup> *The Thousand and One Nights*, Littmann, IV, 319-329 = Weisweiler no. 45.

<sup>119</sup> Cf. Ritter, *Das Meer der Seele*, Analytischer Index, s.v. "Maḥmūd von Ghazna."

erotic ethos, he and his wife have won the battle. And there are numerous other happy couples, happy monogamous unions praised in the sources of eroticism in early Islam.

As for polygamous matrimonial relations, their first literary, but nonfictitious, expression is to be found in the Koran, where instances of tensions in the Prophet's harem have left their traces. The most remarkable verse in this respect is Sura 66:4-5 (translation by Arberry):

If you two repent to God, yet your hearts certainly inclined; but if you support one another against him, God is his protector, and Gabriel, and the righteous among the believers; and, after that, the angels are his supporters. It is possible that, if he divorces you, his Lord will give him in exchange wives better than you, women who have surrendered, believing, obedient, penitent, devout, given to fasting, who have been married and virgins too.

This is a clear and severe threat directed to 'Ā'isha and Ḥafṣa, showing how the Prophet would handle the problem of harmony in the harem; and the admonishment did not miss the mark.

At any rate, I know of no tale of a polygamous love, the emotional quality and moral standard of which would be equal to the tales of the great couples. A good example is the romantic epos *Haft Paikar* by Niẓāmī. The love of the hero, the Sasanian King Bahrām Gūr (Wahram V) for the seven princesses of the seven climates is not elaborated by the poet. The seven nights spent by Bahrām with these beauties remain a mere framework for the seven love tales told by the girls. What is, instead, developed into a moving, persuasive love story is Bahrām's relation to his charming, affectionate, and intelligent slave girl Fitna.<sup>120</sup> The same is true for all the wanton dreams of encounters with a bevy of houri-like nymphs which occur in *The Thousand and One Nights* and elsewhere. The tragic unfulfilledness of this kind of love adventure is unforgettably traced in the sombre story of the first princess (in the black Cupola) in Niẓāmī's *Haft Paikar*.

Another illustration is the story of Qamar az-Zamān and his two wives in *The Thousand and One Nights*. Their triangular matrimonial relation lasts for a few years but is eventually perverted and destroyed by the growing mutual jealousy of the two women, each of whom falls in love with the other's son. In the story of the seventh princess in Amīr Khusrou Dihlawī's *Hasht Bihisht* the king, one of those misogynists who do not want to marry because of what they have read and heard about the perfidy of women, is finally converted and takes four wives at a time, only to detect shortly afterward that three of them are cheating him most disgracefully while the fourth, and, as the poet has it, the least attractive, is the only faithful one among them.

<sup>120</sup> *Heft Paiker*, ed. Ritter and Rypka, chaps. 35 and 36; *The Seven Beauties*, trans. from the Persian, with a Commentary by C. E. Wilson (London, 1924), I, 82-94.



There are other voices here than Nizāmī's, of course, such as Sa'dī's advice to replace one's wife at the end of every year, which, by the way, if practiced, would still fall largely short of the pompous example given by al-Ḥasan, the grandson of the Prophet, with his two hundred spouses. But Sa'dī did not produce great love poetry; most of his ghazals celebrate the abstract, unattainable, stonehearted, male mystical friend. And we know nothing about his wives. Nizāmī, on the contrary, speaks of his three successive wives in his epics, particularly of his first, ardently beloved spouse Apak whose praise he sings in tender verses. Nizāmī's love poetry is convincing because of his personal attitude. It is, no doubt, not by chance that he made significant changes in the character of Shīrīn and in the plot of the story of Bahrām and Fitna, as found in Firdausī's *Shahnāma*: Shīrīn was freed from the stigma of having poisoned a rival; Fitna (called Azāde in the *Shahnāma*) is not killed immediately but given to an officer who spares her life and hides her in his house where she prepares an ingenious stratagem finally leading to the reconciliation with Bahrām.<sup>121</sup> One is, therefore, tempted to believe that Nizāmī's statement on monogamy is not an empty formula:

To marry one wife is enough for a man  
the husband of many is the husband of none.<sup>122</sup>

Sometimes monogamy is pleaded for by drawing a parallel to monotheism. Abu l-'Alā', whom we have already quoted above, said in one of his philosophical poems:

If you associate your wife with another one,  
you commit an error in your decision.  
If any good were to be hoped for from the associates,  
God would not be without associates.<sup>123</sup>

The melting together of 'Udhrite love and mystical love in the Persian ghazal has already been mentioned. But monogamous feeling manifests itself more or less directly in many other tales and poems. As mentioned above, 'Umar promised each of his adored ladies to bestow his love on her exclusively, and many other poets did the same. In the tale of the first shaikh in *The Thousand and One Nights*, a wife whose husband takes a second spouse because the first bore him no child transforms her and their son into animals. Zubaida, Hārūn's wife, is featured in a number of tales and anecdotes in the Hārūn cycle of *The Thousand and One Nights* as intriguing against his slave girls. Saffāḥ, the founder of the

<sup>121</sup> Bertels has pointed to these humanizing alterations of patterns in Nizāmī's poetry, cf. *Nizami i Fuzuli*, pp. 225, 316, and 323-324.

<sup>122</sup> Nizāmī, *Iqbāl-nāma*, ed. W. Dastgirdī (Tehran, 1335/1957), p. 59, line 3.

<sup>123</sup> Translated after 'A. von Kremer, "Philosophische Gedichte des Abū l-'alā Ma'arri," *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft*, 39 (1888), 509.

Abbasid dynasty, is attested to have lived all his life with only one woman, true to the oath he had sworn her when they married.<sup>124</sup>

An Islamic marriage contract did not embody the formula "until death do us part." Divorce was common and for the male partner a convenient act. Muḥammad himself did not divorce any of his wives, although he threatened to, as shown above. But he married Zainab after his adopted son Zaid had divorced her in his favor.<sup>125</sup> An interesting story in the *Battlefields of the Loving* shows how this example of the Prophet might function or not, depending on the situation. An ugly man and his veiled wife appeared before a judge in the eastern district of Basra. The wife claimed a bride price of 4,000 dirhams, whereas the husband said that it only amounted to ten. In order to decide the matter the judge told the wife to take off her veil, and, on beholding her beautiful face, he immediately wanted to marry her himself. He, therefore, asked the man to divorce her referring to Sura 33:37: "So when Zaid had accomplished what he would of her, then we gave her in marriage to thee." But the man answered that neither had he accomplished with his wife what he would of her, nor was he Zaid. They went on quarreling for a while; until the judge, realizing that the man did not accept the Koranic example as obliging in his case, had finally to give in and "went away totally enthralled by his craving for the woman; but without deviating from the right way."<sup>126</sup> I do not think this story implies a criticism of the Prophet, although it may seem so. For the Muslim reader the difference between the two cases is quite clear: Zaid agreed, whereas the man in the story did not. The judge would, in fact, have deviated from the right way, had he insisted on the man's divorcing her. If, however, the man had agreed to the judge's proposal, there would have been nothing wrong in the affair. The Koran itself speaks of this issue in a completely matter-of-fact manner as if treating a simple business affair: "And if ye be desirous to exchange one wife for another, and have given one of them a talent, make no deduction from it. Would you take it by slandering her, and with manifest wrong?" (Sura 4:20). No wonder "exchange stories" are a common motif in the erotic literature concerning us here. And yet, for many Muslims the first of the two matrimonial patterns exemplified by the Prophet, the happy union with Khadīja, was the one they strove to follow, be it for economical reasons or for emotional and moral ones.

Divorce, however, was not necessarily the end of the story. Taking her back was no more difficult than divorcing her, unless the procedure had already taken place twice before, or he had spoken the triple divorce formula straightaway. In this case the repentant husband had to look for a so-called *muḥallil*, somebody

<sup>124</sup> Macoudi, *Les prairies d'or*, ed. and trans. C. Barbier de Meynard (Paris: 1861 f.), VI, 110 f.

<sup>125</sup> Buhl, *Muhammeds Liv*, p. 354.

<sup>126</sup> Paret, *Friiharabische Liebesgeschichten*, no. 78.



who would marry the repudiated woman and divorce her immediately afterward, in order to make her *ḥalāl* or allowed again for her former husband (cf. Koran, Sura 2:230). The law of *taḥlīl* is an Islamic institution that has in recent times come under sharp criticism within Islamic society. Two outstanding modern writers of the Islamic world, the Egyptian Maḥmūd Taimūr and the Iranian Ṣādigh Hidāyat, have written acid satires on the subject, both of them showing the ridiculous and disgraceful consequences to which the implementation of this law may lead.<sup>127</sup> Nevertheless, this institution, too, might fulfill a reasonable function and thereby assume human features. One instance is told in an old story in which Ḥusain ibn 'Alī, without at first realizing and intending it, plays the role of the *muḥallil* for a wife whose husband had definitely divorced her under the pressure of a high official.<sup>128</sup>

The other possible end of a couple's union is death. But at least in poetry, even death is not the last word of their mutual love. Eternal love is one of the ever-returning topics of 'Udhrite poetry. Addressing Buthaina, Jamīl sang:

My heart will love you, as long as I live;  
And when I die my echo will follow your echo between the tombs.<sup>129</sup>

And after old Rāmīn had been buried at the side of Wīs, their union having lasted for eighty-one years:

Their souls were joined together, they saw each other's spirits in heaven.

In heaven these two constant souls were once again joined as bride and groom.<sup>130</sup>

## CONCLUSION

Eroticism, love, and marriage in Islam were decisively modeled after the pattern delineated in the Koran and in the Sunna. The influence of this pattern is manifest everywhere, though in varying degrees. But in literature, there is a larger latitude of free play than in reality. Literature holds positions long since lost in real life; literature dares to dream what is beyond the range of the individual and the laws of society. Thus, in addition to the reflection of the Islamic pattern, a

<sup>127</sup> Sadiq Hidayat, "Muḥallil" (The Interim Husband [lit. Releaser]) in the collection *Sih qaṭra Khūn* (Three Drops of Blood) (Tehran, 1342/1966); Maḥmūd Taimūr, "As-Shaikh Na'im al-Imām" (Sheikh Na'im the Imam) in the collection *Al-Ḥajj Shalabi* (Cairo, 1930, many later reprints).

<sup>128</sup> Ibn Badrūn, *Sharḥ qaṣīdat Ibn 'Abdūn*, ed. R. P. A. Dozy (Leiden, 1846) pp. 174-183 — Weisweiler, no. 26.

<sup>129</sup> Aghānī, VIII, 102.

<sup>130</sup> Morrison, p. 351; Persian text, pp. 532-533.

large area of free play manifests itself in the erotic literature of early Islam. There are uplifts rising high above the sober level of law into the regions of an all-embracing total love, where spirit and body become one, and there are plunges into the lowlands of mere carnal lust and still lower into the morasses of the obscene and the disgusting.

How extensive the free play really is and what laws it follows would be interesting topics to investigate. A number of further questions touched in our paper certainly warrant closer investigation, such as the issue of outspokenness with its different levels and possible changes in the attitude toward it, the figure of the nurse, the usage of 'Udhrite elements as a mere scenery, and last but not least the relation between literary values and moral engagement.





# EROS—HEAVENLY AND NOT SO HEAVENLY— IN SUFI LITERATURE AND LIFE

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When I was a very young scholar, I incurred the wrath of one of my professors, incidentally a lady, because I had translated the famous Bektashi novel *Nūr Bābā* by Yakup Kadri (written in 1922) into German.<sup>1</sup> She found that the blending of religious fervor and earthly love and the story of a Sufi shaikh slowly seducing a lady from Istanbul society were altogether repellent and irreligious, although the language itself of the book was chaste, beautiful, and inoffensive. Her judgment reflected in a certain way the criticism of many adversaries of the Bektashi order in Turkey who used to attack the members of this order because of their allegedly illicit and immoral practices, that is, because they admitted women into their communal meals and rituals. It was all too easy to accuse them of promiscuity, not to mention the use of wine and other evils condemned by the *sharī'a*.<sup>2</sup>

Such criticism of Sufi orders, or of single Sufi saints, by outsiders, nay even by the members of more sober fraternities, goes back to the very Middle Ages. The pious Ibn Khafīf of Shiraz, one of the sternest ascetics of the tenth century, was accused of improper practices<sup>3</sup> by Ibn al-Jauzī (himself a member of the Qādiriyya<sup>4</sup>), and so was his spiritual successor, Kāzarūnī (d. 1035), who emulated him in his strictly lawbound attitude; yet, it was rumored that in his *khānqāh* "keeping company with the unbearded" was common.<sup>5</sup> The veil of secrecy which surrounds many practices in Sufism could easily lead to such accusations, and even in modern Turkish or Arabic literature one finds statements similar to that of Ibn

<sup>1</sup> German trans., *Flamme und Falter* (Gummersbach, 1948).

<sup>2</sup> See J. K. Birge, *The Bektashi Order of Dervishes* (Cambridge, 1937; repr. London, 1965); further J. S. Trimingham, *The Sufi Orders in Islam* (Oxford, 1971).

<sup>3</sup> Ibn al-Jauzī, *Talbīs Iblīs* (Cairo, 1340/1921-22), p. 396. About Ibn Khafīf: see Abū'l-Ḥasan ad-Dailamī, *Sīrat-i Abū 'Abdallah ibn al-Khafīf ash-Shīrāzī*, Persian trans. Ibn Junaid ash-Shīrāzī, ed. A. Schimmel (Ankara, 1955).

<sup>4</sup> See George Makdisi, "The Hanbalite School and Sufism," in *Humaniora Islamica*, Vol. II (1974).

<sup>5</sup> Fritz Meier, *Die Vita des Scheich Abū Ishāq al-Kāzarūnī* (Leipzig, 1948), p. 502.



'Aqīl: "When a shaikh is alone with a foreign woman, they say 'His daughter who is just being invested with the patched frock!'"<sup>6</sup>

In later times it was indeed not unusual for female family members of faithful followers to be offered to the shaikh or Pir for temporary use.<sup>7</sup> Furthermore, some practices during the annual festivities at certain saints' shrines have justly led to criticism from more orthodox circles. Noted in this report is the 'urs in Tanta, Aḥmad al-Badawī's last resting place. 'urs, literally "wedding," is the term for the anniversary of a saint's death, called so because his soul has reached the final union with the divine beloved. Aḥmad al-Badawī (d. 1278) was the founder of a rural order with deep reminiscences of pre-Islamic, Egyptian customs, including the celebration of his 'urs according to the solar calendar, which may well have its root in age-old fertility rites.<sup>8</sup> This aspect is alluded to in the oft-quoted story that Aḥmad's most famous follower in later centuries, the pious author ash-Sha'rānī (d. 1565), was inspired by a hidden voice to consummate his marriage in the saint's burial place. The free mixture of sexes during the *maulid* in Tanta was often criticized, so much so that some Mamluk sultans even forbade the Mamluks to attend the fair in Tanta.<sup>9</sup> The followers of the saint, then, could easily remind their critics of the fact that during the *ḡawāf* around the Ka'ba in Mecca men and women were celebrating jointly. Besides, in their opinion, whosoever visits the place and sins yet gains God's mercy.<sup>10</sup> The strong tensions in Tanta and the atmosphere have been recently described in an Arabic psychological novel, 'Abdul Ḥakīm Qāsim's *Ayyām al-insān as-sab'a*, which deserves a detailed analysis.<sup>11</sup>

Perhaps even more notorious than the *maulid* of Aḥmad al-Badawī was the fair in Sehwan in the Indus Valley, an old Shiva sanctuary (Siwistan), which became the seat of a most fascinating Sufi saint in the thirteenth century. Although this La'ī Shahbāz Qalandar is described as a stern ascetic, his followers belong to the group of qalandars who claim not to be bound to the law, and his asceticism manifests the *jalāl*-side of religion as do the strange acts of worship at his tomb.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>6</sup> Fritz Meier, *Abū Sa'īd-i Abū l-Khair* (Leiden, 1976), p. 350. A typical example is the Turkish novel by R. H. Karay, *Kadınlar Tekkesi* (Istanbul, ca. 1952).

<sup>7</sup> See H. T. Lambrick, *The Terrorist* (London, 1960), a book that deals with the mystico-social movement of the Ḥurr in Sind during the 1930s and 1940s.

<sup>8</sup> Trimmingham, *The Sufi Orders*, s.v. "Badawīyya"; and the article "Aḥmad al-Badawī," in *Encyclopedia of Islam*, 2d ed., I, 280; H. Kriss, *Volksglauben im Bereich des Islam*, Vol. I (Wiesbaden, 1960), pp. 69 f.; E. Littmann, *Aḥmed il-Bedawī; Ein Lied auf den ägyptischen Nationalheiligen* (Wiesbaden, 1951).

<sup>9</sup> See A. Schimmel, "Sufismus und Heiligenverehrung im spätmittelalterlichen Ägypten," in *Festschrift Werner Caskel*, ed. E. Gräf (Leiden, 1968), p. 277.

<sup>10</sup> Meier, *Abū Sa'īd*, pp. 482 f.

<sup>11</sup> See Nagi Naguib, "al-Khurūj ilā as-sayyid al-badawī," in *Fikrun wa Fann; Zeitschrift für die Arabische Welt*, ed. Albert Theile and Annemarie Schimmel (Hamburg, 1972), Vol. 20.

<sup>12</sup> About him see John A. Subhan, *Sufism: Its Saints and Shrines* (Lucknow, 1960), pp. 258 f.; H. Sadarangani, *Persian Poets of Sind* (Karachi, 1956), pp. 6 ff.; R. Gramlich, *Die schiitischen Derwischorden Persiens*, Vol. I (Wiesbaden, 1966), pp. 71, 78.

The existence of a remnant of Shiva cult, a stone *lingam*, in the sanctuary explains much of the happenings there, as they have been described by some travelers.<sup>13</sup> Recently the celebrations have been purged, as have the festivities in another saint's tomb within the city limits of Islamabad, which was a favorite gathering place for prostitutes. In events of this kind, examples of which could certainly be multiplied, enemies of the movement and puritanic reformers could easily find a key to the alleged sexual libertinism of the Sufis in general.

A study of early Sufism reveals, however, the picture of a predominantly ascetic movement with strong control of body and spirit. Utter avoidance of anything unlawful, even doubtful, was a condition of the Path; the discipline was extremely strict. And yet we find shockingly obscene words and tales in the works of some of the greatest masters, who otherwise certainly cannot be accused of licentious conduct. Fritz Meier remarks<sup>14</sup> that even the sternest ascetic sometimes needed a kind of relaxation with dirty jokes, and we have here a case of the well-known polarity between ritually unbridled behavior (*Zügellosigkeit*) and renunciation, as defined by G. van der Leeuw who says: "The enormous spiritual power which is pressed together in the course of the ascetic training and practice is set loose for some moments and squandered lest the pressure become too strong."<sup>15</sup> That explains, to a certain extent, the introduction of dirty stories in the books of wisdom such as Sanā'ī's *Ḥadīqat al-ḥaqīqa*. When Rūmī, taking over a statement of Sanā'ī, claims that:

My dirty jokes are not dirty jokes, but instruction,<sup>16</sup>

he probably alludes to this secret of compression and setting loose. The verse occurs in Book V of the *Mathnawī*, famous for the great number of more or less obscene stories that, beginning at the end of Book IV, fill many pages of this volume, a single one being left to the very end of Book VI. In all of them, however, the poet suddenly plunges into a hymnical praise of true, Divine, love.

This literary aspect is always slightly embarrassing for the lover and translator

<sup>13</sup> For a satirical but largely correct account about Sehwan and other places in the Indus Valley see Peter Mayne, *Saints of Sind* (London, 1956); further, Richard Burton, *Sindh and the Races that Inhabit the Valley of the Indus* (London, 1851; repr. 1973).

<sup>14</sup> Meier, *Abu Sa'īd*, p. 205.

<sup>15</sup> G. van der Leeuw, *Phänomenologie der Religion* (2d. ed.; Tübingen, 1956), p. 257.

<sup>16</sup> Jalāluddīn Rūmī, *Mathnawī-yi ma'nawī*, ed., trans., and commented upon by Reynold A. Nicholson (8 vols.; London and Leiden, 1925-1940), V, 2496, with commentary, VIII, p. 275, where the reader is referred to Sanā'ī, *Ḥadīqat al-ḥaqīqa* IX, fol. 229a. In the printed edition of the *Ḥadīqa* (ed. M. Razawī, Tehran, 1329/1950) this verse is lacking, although chapter IX contains enough "dirty jokes." The *Mathnawī* (so cited hereafter) is noted for the following stories which Nicholson preferred to translate into Latin instead of English: The Evil Woman and the Tree (IV, 2544 ff.); The Maid and the Donkey (V, 1338 ff.); The Catamite and the Sodomite (V, 2497 ff.); Jūhā dressed as Woman in the Mosque (V, 3325 ff.); The Slave-girl and the Impotent Caliph (V, 3942 ff.); The Adventure in a 'azabkhāna (VI, 3843 ff.).



of medieval Sufi poetry. But we have to admit that in the case of many Sufis of the lower order the constant complaint of the critics was justified, that is, that their *qibla* consisted of *shikam*, *sham'* and *shāhid*: stomach, candles (in festivities), and a beautiful boy.

This, of course, contradicts the traditional attitude of the moderate Sufi masters as expressed by Sulamī, the best interpreter of the normal ethical behavior. According to him one of the most important aspects of Sufism is to preserve one's *ḥayā'* (sexual modesty; also: sense of decency, or shame) in every state, for "*ḥayā'* is part of faith."<sup>17</sup> Rūmī, however, bursting out in frenzied passion, turns the *ḥadīth* over: "Shame hinders you from true faith."<sup>18</sup> Shame, for him, became a catchword for man's unwillingness to sacrifice reputation and worldly interests in the way of God, in the intoxicated dance toward the Beloved.

But let us turn back to the foundations of classical Sufi conduct. The traditional Sufi leaders recognized seven gates to Hell: pride, cupidity, lust, anger, envy, avarice, and hatred,<sup>19</sup> and the story of the two fallen angels, Hārūt and Mārūt, as told in the Koran (Sura 2:96 f.), could well illustrate the danger of following one's own sensual desires. (The old image of the whore of Babylon can easily be detected in the Babylonian well where the two angels are incarcerated.) There was no mercy for those who did not follow the path of asceticism and in early Sufism that meant largely sexual restriction. Hujwīrī makes the most outspoken statement in this respect: "Sufism is founded on celibacy. . . . There is no flame of lust that cannot be extinguished by strenuous effort because whatever vice proceeds from your self, you possess the instrument that will remove it. . . ."<sup>20</sup> Shiblī (d. 945) explains Sura 24:30: "O Muḥammad, tell the believers to refrain their bodily eyes from what is unlawful, and to refrain their spiritual eyes from everything except God," a saying that Hujwīrī elaborates by stating: "In truth, until God clears the desire of lust in a man's heart the bodily eye is not safe from its hidden dangers."<sup>21</sup> But it is hoped that finally true, that is, spiritual, love will extend its empire over the different parts of the body and divert all the senses of their sensual qualities.<sup>22</sup> Man should tread on passion, *hawā*, in order to fly in the air, *hawā*, as the early Sufis said with a pun. But they discovered this lust everywhere: the lust of the eye is sight; of the ear, hearing; of the nose, smelling; of the tongue, speech; of the mind, thought. There is no dearth of dramatic descriptions of this lust under the image of rapacious animals, such as the wolf or the disobedient dog.<sup>23</sup> Satan, or rather one of the satanic manifestations, was,

<sup>17</sup> Meir J. Kister, *as-Sulamī's Kitāb adab as-ṣūḥba* (Jerusalem, 1954), p. 31.

<sup>18</sup> *Mathnawī*, II, 1368, and Commentary, VII, p. 289.

<sup>19</sup> So. R. A. Nicholson in *Mathnawī*, Commentary, VII, p. 68.

<sup>20</sup> 'Alī ibn 'Uthmān al-Jullabī al-Hujwīrī, *Kashf al-maḥjub*, trans. Reynold A. Nicholson (Leiden, 1911; repr. London, 1959), p. 364 (hereafter Hujwīrī/Nicholson).

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 156.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 364.

<sup>23</sup> Kāzarunī compared it to a wolf, and so did Maulānā Rūmī, see *Dīwān-i Kabīr yā Kulīyār*.



according to Sayyid 'Alī Hamadhānī (d. 1385), contained in the *dhakar*,<sup>24</sup> and Hujwīrī tells the story of a Sufi from Merw who in the bath wanted "to amputate the member which is the source of all lusts and keeps you afflicted with so much evil . . . But God revealed to him: 'If you do this I swear by My glory that I will put a hundredfold lust and passion in every hair in that place!'"<sup>25</sup>

The lower instincts, the "flesh," were made to undergo a strict education in which hunger played a dominant role.<sup>26</sup> That is why we find extended periods of fasting in the course of the *via purgativa*, whereas on the higher levels fasting was often seen as a state of grace, comparable with that of the angels who feed on Divine Light.

One should not assume that for these early ascetics their renunciation was a goal in itself; it was rather the ladder that was to lead them to a higher goal, and, as such, it can be seen as a sacrifice for the sake of something infinitely more precious, namely, for God's love; for asceticism is, typologically, another, less bloodstained, form of sacrifice. The Sindhi pun that the loving woman soul by becoming a *qurbānī*, a sacrifice, will become a *qarībānī*, a near one, points to this idea.<sup>27</sup> The Sufis felt that sex disturbs the pure surrender of the soul (*Störungsmotiv*).<sup>28</sup> And since their aim was to be with God alone, without the world and its distractions, one can very well understand their aversion to everything worldly; they were disgusted by the world (*Weltekel*) and had therefore also to hate women, since through woman this world is renewed and continued. This hatred for the world was a central aspect of Buddhism, and we may accept the influence of this attitude on the Khorassanian ascetics, headed by Ibn Adham from Balkh, the old capital of Buddhist Bactria. Similar views of Mediterranean Christian ascetics may have influenced early Muslim ascetics in Syria and the Iraq.<sup>29</sup> After all, they were befriended in their dreams by the houris of Paradise, if they refrained from earthly desires; and it is stated that such dreams enhanced

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<sup>1</sup> Shams, ed. Badī'uzzamān Furūzānfar (10 vols.; Tehran, 1956 ff.), no. 2862. In *Mathnawī*, V, 43 ff., one finds the comparison with the rooster. For more comparisons see A. Schimmel, *The Triumphal Sun: A Study of the Works of Jalāloddin Rumi* (London, 1978), Part II, chap. IV, Imagery Inspired by Animals.

<sup>24</sup> Johann Karl Teufel, *Eine Lebensbeschreibung des Scheichs 'Alī-i Hamadhānī* (Leiden, 1962), p. 85.

<sup>25</sup> Hujwīrī/Nicholson, p. 209.

<sup>26</sup> One may also think of the fact that sexual intercourse is prohibited in daytime during Ramadan.

<sup>27</sup> Shāh 'Abd ul-Laīf Bhitā'ī, *Risālah*, ed. Kalyan B. Adwani (Bombay, 1958), Sur Kohyārī, IV, 9.

<sup>28</sup> Walter Schubart, *Religion und Eros* (Munich, 1941), p. 177. The book gives an excellent introduction to the various aspects of eros and religion, although it presents a mere caricature of Islam.

<sup>29</sup> For these relations see Tor Andrae, *I Myrtenrådsgården* (Uppsala, 1947); German trans. H. H. Kanus, *Islamische Mytiker* (Stuttgart, 1960).

their piety.<sup>30</sup> Rūmī points to this combination when he likens the spiritual perfection enjoyed by the elect to the virgin brides of Paradise.<sup>31</sup>

The fear of the demonic power of sex and its dangers are well known in Sufism. The very fact that the sexual act requires a ritual bath of the whole body indicates the danger of this act, in which demonic powers might easily interfere as they were thought to do in older religions in childbirth, marriage, and death.<sup>32</sup> Out of fear of the uncontrollable, dangerous, and yet fascinating power of sex logically develops the tendency to see all the dreaded (hence hated) aspects of life in woman: the concept of the *naʿfs*, the lower self, luckily feminine in Arabic, offered the early ascetics innumerable possibilities for voicing their hatred for the principle of lust and, as its corollary, the continuation of this world which seemed to be a veil before the pure, eternal Beauty of God. The ascetics' equation of the world with an old ugly crone, a rotten prostitute who entices man and then leaves him in misery, belongs to the same order of thought and goes parallel with similar expressions in Buddhism and medieval monastic Christian tradition.<sup>33</sup> "The animal qualities prevail in woman," thus says even Rūmī,<sup>34</sup> who has described in the story of Kharāqānī's hideous wife and the saint's appearance riding on a lion the supremacy man gains over the world once he has subdued this female *naʿfs*.<sup>35</sup> It was again Rūmī who time and again repeated stories about and allusions to the feminine *naʿfs* and the masculine exalted spirit, a spirit who expresses man's deep sorrow in the world by exclaiming:

First and last my fall is through woman!<sup>36</sup>

Women are impure, stupid, and dangerous. We see with some surprise that Persian Sufi poets allude in plain words to her impurity, comparing the greatest obstacles for the spiritual wayfarer to her menstruation, whether these obstacles be lust, or, much more frequently, miracle-mongering: the Eastern tradition says: "Miracles are the menstruation of men,"<sup>37</sup> since miracles bar the way to true

<sup>30</sup> Meier, *Abū Saʿīd*, pp. 205 f.

<sup>31</sup> *Mathnawī*, V, 3292, and Commentary, VIII, p. 290, where the "spiritual experiences," *dhawq-i jān*, are described as *qāṣirāt aḡ-jaḡfī*, "with chaste looks," as the Koran describes the houris (Sura 37:47; 38:52; 55:56).

<sup>32</sup> The importance of the *rites de passage* was first discussed by A. van Gennep in his book *Rites de passage* (Paris, 1909; Engl. trans., 1960).

<sup>33</sup> Thus *Mathnawī*, VI, 1222; see the examples in A. Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam* (Chapel Hill, 1975), Appendix II.

<sup>34</sup> *Mathnawī*, V, 2465.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, VI, 2044-2129.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, VI, 2799. There is no solution to this problem comparable with that expressed by St. Bernard: *Sic vir non cadit nisi per feminam, etiam non erigitur nisi per feminam* (quoted by van der Leeuw, *Phänomenologie*, p. 259).

<sup>37</sup> See *Mathnawī*, VI, 2935; for the miracles as "menstruation of men" see Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions*, pp. 212 f. Khāqānī (d. 1199) says in a ghazal:

union with God as much as a wife's impurity bars the possibility of true conjugal union.

The whole complex of fear of the demonic and impure side of the touching of body to body is reflected in a certain way in the idea that the bath, where one has to cleanse oneself from such acts, is regarded as the seat of devils and demons:

In the touching of body with body man needs a bath—

Where would be the necessity of a bath when the spirits touch each other?<sup>38</sup>

To see a bath in one's dream points to the dreamer's committing abomination.<sup>39</sup> It is not by chance that the hero of Rūmī's story about the repentance of Nāṣūḥ is a person employed in the public bath who, disguised as a woman, enjoys massaging the lovely ladies until in the moment of imminent life-danger he repents sincerely.<sup>40</sup>

One should also remember, however, the importance given to the bathing ritual for the breaking of the *nafs*: it was indeed one of the favorite practices of many Sufis to perform *ghusl* before every prayer, and Hamadhānī once performed

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From the female qualification with the water of manliness,  
Did we wash the menstruation of color and scent.

(*Dīwān*, ed. Z. Sajjādī [Tehran, 1338/1959], p. 633).

<sup>38</sup> Rūmī, *Dīwān*, no. 2207. Some other charming verses connected with the imagery of love and bath:

This is even stranger that my eye which did not sleep from longing for you  
Went every morning to the bath due to the union with you!

(*Dīwān*, no. 2234).

The image of my friend came into the hot bath of my tears,  
The pupil of my eyes sat there as the watchman.

(*Dīwān*, no. 3073).

Particularly interesting is the quatrain no. 285:

This hot bath which is the house of the evil spirits  
And the private resting place of Satan:  
Yet, in it there is a fairy, someone with fairy-cheeks hidden.  
Much infidelity is certainly the ambush of faith!

I.e., just as the beautiful beloved goes to the bath, which is, in itself, a dangerous and unholy place, thus outward infidelity may also conceal true spiritual beauty. For the whole complex see H. Grotzfeld, *Das Bad im arabisch-islamischen Mittelalter* (Wiesbaden, 1970).

<sup>39</sup> 'Abd ul-Ghanī an-Nābulusī, *Ta'fīr al-anām fī ta'bīr al-manām*, quoted by G. E. von Grunebaum, *The Dream and Human Society* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, University of California Press, 1966), p. 9.

<sup>40</sup> *Mathnawī*, V, 2228 ff.



the bath in the icy water of a Central Asian river for forty consecutive days after a pollution in order to educate his lower instincts.<sup>41</sup>

But woman is not only unclean and closely connected with powers that may hinder the wayfarer's ascent to higher spheres. She is also of little intelligence: to consult with women and then to act contrary to their advice is an oft quoted *ḥadīth* with the Sufis.<sup>42</sup> It was only the women who had spiritually reached an advanced stage, such as (the unmarried) Rābi'a and (the married) Fāṭima of Nishapur, who were taken as man's peer, and could even freely converse with them, for "if a woman walks in the Path of God, she cannot be considered a woman."<sup>43</sup>

Some Sufis were immune to the other sex, and would have agreed with Kāzarūnī's statement that he would have married if there had been a difference, for him, between a woman and a pillar.<sup>44</sup> He prohibited his disciples from sitting with women and with unbearded young men, but advised them to get married if they could not restrain their lust.<sup>45</sup> As far as we can see most Sufis in the early centuries followed this advice. After all, besides their preference for ascetic restriction they had before them as a model the Prophet's *sunna* of getting married. But even if they got married, or permitted marriage, they still found it dangerous, and certainly not advantageous for man. Ibrāhīm ibn Adham coined the famous sentence: "When a man marries he boards a ship, and when a child is born to him he suffers shipwreck."<sup>46</sup> Fuḍail ibn 'Iyāḍ's remark that family life is the greatest obstacle to religious life<sup>47</sup> is explained in a statement by Dārānī: "The

<sup>41</sup> See Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions*, p. 149; Teufel, *Ḥamaḍūnī*, p. 69. Rūmī speaks in one of his ghazals (*Dīwān*, no. 158) of a "lovely phantasy, nicely teasing, like a nightly pollution."

<sup>42</sup> The *ḥadīth* is quoted in *Aḥādīth-i Mathnawī* ed. Badī'uzzamān Furūzānfar (Tehran 1334/1956), no. 74. Cf. Sulamī's remark: "These with little intelligence are yet most clever in stealing man's intelligence!" and his quotation of 'Alī's alleged saying: "The intellect of a woman is her beauty, and a man's beauty is his intellect" (Kister, *Sulamī's adab aṣ-ṣuḥba*, p. 51).

<sup>43</sup> For Rābi'a see Margaret Smith, *Rābi'a the Mystic and Her Fellow Saints in Islam* (Cambridge, 1928). About Fāṭima of Nishapur see Hujwīrī/Nicholson, p. 120: although she lived in seclusion with her husband, on seeing Bāyezīd she removed her veil, and explained this to her husband Ibn Khidrūya: "You are my natural spouse, but he is my religious consort. Through you I come to my desire, but through him to God. The proof is that he has no need of my society, whereas to you it is necessary." See also 'Aṭṭār, *Tadhkirat al-auliya'*, ed. Reynold A. Nicholson (London and Leiden, 1905-1907; repr. 1959), I, 285; Jāmī, *Nafahāt al-uns*, ed. M. Tauḥīdīpūr (Tehran, 1336/1957), p. 620. The same author also tells of women who participated in the meetings of Sufi Shaikhs; Abū Bakr al-Kattānī's daughter died during a sermon of Sumnūn al-Muḥibb (*Ibid.*, p. 623).

<sup>44</sup> Meier, *Kāzarūnī*, p. 36.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, para. 158, line 22; para. 358, line 18; cf. also Kister, *Sulamī*, p. 51.

<sup>46</sup> As-Sarrāj, *Kitāb al-luma' fī'l-taṣawwuf*, ed. Reynold A. Nicholson (London and Leiden, 1914), p. 199.

<sup>47</sup> 'Aṭṭār, *Tadhkirat al-auliya'*, I, 31. On the death of Miān Mīr (d. 1635 in Lahore) a poet wrote a chronogram in which he states that "in his whole life he did not become fettered by the thought of a wife or the grief of children (in: Mīr 'Alī Shīr Qānī, *Maqalāt ash-shi'arā*, ed. Sayyid Hussamuddin Rashdi [Karachi, 1956], p. 502).

sweetness of adoration and undisturbed surrender of the heart which a single man can feel the married man can never experience,"<sup>48</sup> as Sa'dī would say some 400 years later:

But in praying I can never forget:  
What will my children eat tomorrow?<sup>49</sup>

Therefore it is small wonder that the sorrows of family life were considered to be "punishment for the execution of legally permitted lusts."<sup>50</sup>

If the Sufi is married, he should better follow 'Alī's alleged advice: "Let not your wife and children be your chief concern." Did not even Abraham leave Hagar in the loneliness, and Moses the daughter of Shu'aib?<sup>51</sup> For "if they are God's friends, God will look after them, otherwise, why care for them at all?" Such an attitude was quite common among the early members of the Chishti order in India, and K. A. Nizami's description of how some of these saints dealt with their wives and children displays a frightening hardening of the heart against any nonreligious concern,<sup>52</sup> similar to the case of Fuḍail, who was seen smiling only once in thirty years—when his son died.<sup>53</sup>

Some Sufis would practice asceticism even though married, as early sources tell. One of the most famous, though legendary, stories in this respect is that of Ibn Khafīf who married four hundred women *tabarrukan*, for the sake of blessing, and then sent them away without having touched them. Of the forty who stayed with him none had ever seen him give in to his lust.<sup>54</sup> This version, told by Hujwīrī, is certainly not accurate, for we know that he had at least one son; and he was well aware of the various pleasures of body and soul. The body, he says, has three pleasures: eating, sleeping, and sexual intercourse; the soul has three other pleasures: a beautiful voice, fragrance, and *naẓar*, "looking at beautiful individuals."<sup>55</sup>

Marriage could also be understood as a kind of education: to be married to a talkative, misbehaving spouse was considered to be a substitute for hellfire and was therefore willingly accepted by quite a few Sufis, including Aḥmad ar-Rifā'i

<sup>48</sup> Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazzālī, *Iḥyā' 'ulūm ad-dīn* (Bulaq, 1289/1872), II, 222.

<sup>49</sup> Muṣliḥuddīn Sa'dī, *Gulistan*, Bāb-i duwwum (*Kulliyāt*, ed. M. A. Furughi, [Tehran, 1342/1963]), I, 73.

<sup>50</sup> Jāmī, *Nafahāt al-uns*, p. 185. Cf. also Rūmī, *Dīwān*, no. 195, where he warns people of too much sex because that will weaken them: "for the cohabitation with something dead makes the body cold." In another ghazal (*Dīwān* no. 784) he describes the various people returning to their normal occupations after the festive days of the 'Īd: the true lovers have their business only with the bazaar of the Friend, but "the lowly ones go to their parties, contracted to their private parts and their stomach." That means, they are bound to follow their lust.

<sup>51</sup> Hujwīrī/Nicholson, p. 74.

<sup>52</sup> K. A. Nizami, *The Life and Times of Shaikh Farīd Ganj-i Shukar* (Aligarh, 1955).

<sup>53</sup> Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazzālī, *Iḥyā'*, IV, 282.

<sup>54</sup> Hujwīrī/Nicholson, p. 247; 'Aṣṣār, *Tadhkirat al-auliya* II, 128-129; but cf. Dailamī, *Sīrat-i Ibn al-Khafīf*, Part II, para. 15, and the introduction.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, Part XII, para. 1.



(d. 1178) and Maḥzar Jānjānān (d. 1781 in Delhi).<sup>56</sup> Or, based on the Koranic dictum, "They are your garments..." (Sura 2:168), the Sufi might regard them as a garment on which to wipe his faults, as Maulānā Rūmī says in *Fīhi mā fīhi*:

By enduring and putting up with the tyranny of women it is as though you rub off your own impurities on them. Your character becomes good through forbearance; their character becomes bad through domineering and aggression. When you have realized this, make yourself clean. Know that they are like a garment; in them you cleanse your own impurities and become clean yourself.<sup>57</sup>

But Rūmī knew also that patient desisting from lust will bring a good result, just as someone who has two wives may send one off and enjoy the other one all the more.<sup>58</sup>

On the whole, many Sufis seem to have led a rather normal family life: the touching story about Ruwaim and his little daughter,<sup>59</sup> the remarks about Ibn 'Aḥḥā and his ten lovely sons,<sup>60</sup> or some sentences by Najmuddīn Kubrā<sup>61</sup> point to a normal, if not happy, family life. And Junaid is reported to have said that he needed sex as much as food.<sup>62</sup>

That would be close to the line of some later Sufis, among them the members of the Naqshbandiyya, who taught to overcome lust by means of *dhikr*; but if they should fail to do so they should fulfill their desire as quickly as possible in order to return to work without too much delay.<sup>63</sup> This somewhat functional and loveless lovemaking is counteracted by the sayings or descriptions of some other Sufis who certainly did enjoy the pleasures of the body and of love. Among them the expressions of Bahā'uddīn Walad, Rūmī's father, are remarkably outspoken. He considered the admiration of female beauty and the enjoyment of love as legitimate means of transcending worldly beauty and of reaching the vision of God and His creative power, quite contrary to an ethical maximalist like al-Muḥāsibī (d. 857) who had blamed the pious who looked at beautiful women in order to be reminded of the houris of Paradise.<sup>64</sup> Bahā'uddīn Walad, however, sees the power

<sup>56</sup> See *Encyclopedia of Islam*, 1st ed., s.v. "Aḥmad ar-Rifā'i"; for the family troubles of Maḥzar Jānjānān, a leading Naqshbandi mystic of Delhi (1699-1781), see his *Makrūbāt*, ed. A. R. Quraishi (Bombay, 1966).

<sup>57</sup> *Fīhi mā fīhi*, trans. A. J. Arberry, *Discourses of Rumi* (London, 1961), p. 98.

<sup>58</sup> Rūmī, *Dīwān*, no. 1340.

<sup>59</sup> Dailamī, *Ibn al-Khaṭīb*, Part VI, para. 1.

<sup>60</sup> 'Aḥḥār, *Tadhkirat al-auliya*, II, 68.

<sup>61</sup> Fritz Meier, *Die 'fawā'id al-ḡamāl wa fawā'id al-ḡalāl' des Naḡmuddīn al-Kubrā* (Wiesbaden, 1957), p. 51.

<sup>62</sup> Quoted by Hans Bauer, *Das 12. Buch von al-Gazālī's Hauptwerk, Von der Ehe*, übersetzt und erläutert (Halle, 1917), p. 26 n.1.

<sup>63</sup> Quoted *ibid.*

<sup>64</sup> Meier, *Abū Sa'īd*, p. 206.

of *shahwat* everywhere, recognizing in it the kindness or the *ladhdhat*, the enjoyment of God. Looking at the legs and backs of women he felt like enjoying "God's wine which makes man unconscious and enables him to praise God more effectively,"<sup>65</sup> and in an Arabic passage he claims that "the...[the Persian editor has left out the relevant word "because of its indecency"!] of a lustful woman is the highest mosque for obedience to the Lord,"<sup>66</sup> expressions which are complemented by others but which are hardly translatable.<sup>67</sup> His son Jalāluddīn, then, describes the joys of lovemaking without inhibition, rather with apparent pleasure, in the story of the drunken *faqīh* and his dealing with a girl whom he treats "as a baker treats the dough,"<sup>68</sup> and also in the story of the young woman who became pregnant in spite of her father's advice.<sup>69</sup> The "hand game of husband and wife"<sup>70</sup> is mentioned in his verse as is the feeling of the woman whose twenty children will always remind her of the happy moments of union.<sup>71</sup> Much later Khwāja Mīr Dard of Delhi (d. 1785)—the only major Sufi to write clearly: "I love my wife and my children dearly"<sup>72</sup>—makes some remarks about the duty of women to decorate themselves in order "that the work of begetting and procreating can be done frequently and nicely."<sup>73</sup> The very fact that some of the leading Sufi masters had large families—Aḥmad-i Jām, 43 children; 'Abdul Qādir al-Jīlānī, 49 children—shows that the earlier ascetic habit was later practiced only in exceptional cases.<sup>74</sup> Some of them might probably have excused their indulgence in sex by the feeling that man, after having renounced every pleasure of the *nafs* in the earlier stations of the Path, "could stretch out his hand to everything without being damaged,"<sup>75</sup> an idea that could doubtlessly lead to rather unsaintly excesses.

The general attitude toward the "inferior" woman is complemented, to a certain extent, by the famous tradition according to which perfume and women were dear to the Prophet, and his consolation was in prayer.<sup>76</sup> Out of this tradition the school of Ibn 'Arabī developed the idea that "love of women belongs to the perfections of the gnostics, for it is inherited from the Prophet and is a divine

<sup>65</sup> Bahā'uddīn Walad, *Ma'ārif*, Vol. IV, ed. Badī'u-zamān Furūzānfar (Tehran, 1338/1959), p. 2; cf. p. 5.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid., p. 18.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., p. 35; cf. p. 10.

<sup>68</sup> *Mathnawī*, VI, 3921 f., esp. lines 3946-3949.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid., V, 3716 ff.

<sup>70</sup> *Dīwān*, no. 2003.

<sup>71</sup> *Mathnawī*, VI, 1804-1807.

<sup>72</sup> Khwāja Mīr Dard, *'Ilm ul-kitāb* (Bhopal, 1309/1891), and "Nāla-yi Dard," in *Chahār Risāla* (Bhopal 1310/1892), no. 70.

<sup>73</sup> Dard, *'Ilm ul-kitāb*, p. 523.

<sup>74</sup> Jāmī, *Nafahāt al-uns*, p. 357; cf. Burton, *Sindh*, p. 207, about the Pir of Kingri!

<sup>75</sup> Meier, *Abu Sa'īd*, p. 145, a quotation from Tirmidhī.

<sup>76</sup> This oft-quoted *ḥadīth* forms the basis for the concluding chapter, on Muḥammad, in Ibn 'Arabī's *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam*.



love."<sup>77</sup> That is a far cry from earlier ascetic statements, but a foundation for the positive attitude toward sex in later times, perhaps also an excuse for all too frequent indulgence in human love. . . .

For Ibn 'Arabī, woman was the place of manifestation of the Divine names connected with forming and creating,<sup>78</sup> and Rūmī follows him in this respect at least in one surprising passage of the *Mathnawī*.<sup>79</sup> The whole "para-sexual symbolism of Ibn 'Arabī," as Fazlur Rahman calls it,<sup>80</sup> belongs to this new approach to the feminine side of God as manifested in women. Lailā, the ideal of Majnūn, is the poetical metaphor of this love relation between man and God.

However, the appreciation of woman in this form is no more the rule in Sufism than is the full appreciation of conjugal life. Women were generally seen as the lowest rung of the spiritual ladder, as expressed in the well-known saying by Jamāl Hānswī: *ṭālib ad-dunyā mu'annath, ṭālib al-ākhirā mukhannath, ṭālib al-mawlā mudhakkar*: "The seeker of the world is feminine, the seeker of the otherworld is a hermaphrodite, and the seeker of the Lord is masculine."<sup>81</sup> Incidentally, the seeker of something besides God is classified as a hermaphrodite as early as in 'Aṭṭār's poetry,<sup>82</sup> and this type of person has been described in rather drastic verse by Rūmī.<sup>83</sup> For the true hero of Sufism is the "man," *ṣalā, mard, jawānmard, er*.

This leads us to an aspect of love which is usually connected with the Sufi

<sup>77</sup> Hellmut Ritter, *Das Meer der Seele* (Leiden, 1955), p. 480.

<sup>78</sup> E.g., the names *khāliq, muṣawwir, muqaddir*: see Nicholson in *Mathnawī*, Commentary, VII, pp. 155 f., where he mentions also related theories by Najm ud-dīn Dāyā in his *Mirṣād ul-'ibād*. Ibn 'Arabī admitted of the possibility that women were among the group of saints called *abdāl* (see Jāmī, *Nafahāt al-uns*, p. 615).

<sup>79</sup> *Mathnawī*, I, 2437.

<sup>80</sup> Fazlur Rahman, *Islam* (London, 1966), p. 146: "Adam, he taught, was really the first female for Eve was born from his inside, an act repeated by the second Adam, Mary, in generating Jesus. In the subsequent Persian Sufi poetry that blossomed so brilliantly, amorous images are employed in stark realism and many poets have been objects of controversy as to whether they were singing of spiritual love or earthly passion."

<sup>81</sup> Invented by the thirteenth century Indian mystic Jamāl Hānswī, see Zubaid Ahmad, *The Contribution of Indo-Pakistan to Arabic Literature* (2d. ed; Lahore, 1968), p. 82. The saying has been very popular in Sindhi Sufi poetry up to our day.

<sup>82</sup> Farīduddīn 'Aṭṭār, *Ushturnāma*, ed. M. Muḥaqqiq (Tehran, 1339/1960), chap. 20, par. 1.

<sup>83</sup> Rūmī, in a quatrain, addresses someone who does useless things (Rubā'iyāt no. 1784):

Oh, woe that you play the tamboura before the deaf,  
Or that Yūsuf should live together with a blind person,  
Or that you put sugar in a sick person's mouth,  
Or that a catamite becomes the spouse of a houri!

See also *Dīwān*, nos. 2878, 2137, and 2280, the amusing ghazal where a hermaphrodite complains to a shepherd that his buck has gazed at him so strangely. The *ṣawāshī*, the eunuch as guard of the women's apartments, is mentioned once as "eunuch of his grief" (*Dīwān* no. 1405).

experience, that is, the “love of the unbearded” and the whole problem of the mystical contemplation of a young beautiful male. The theories developed by the Sufis particularly in Iran and Turkey try to stress the perfect chastity of the lover, *la chasteté du regard*, claiming that looking at these beautiful forms may be a reminder of the prophets and angels whom one has seen in a vision.<sup>84</sup> Such a “looking” in a society where decent female company was practically unobtainable outside wedlock was, of course, not always restricted to mere distant admiration. Therefore Hujwīrī utters the strong verdict that “looking at youths and associating with them are forbidden practices, and anyone who declares them to be allowable is an unbeliever.”<sup>85</sup> As early a Sufi as al-Kharrāz (d. ca. 890) had a vision of Iblīs who boasted that he had at least one snare left to trap the Sufi, namely his association with the unbearded.<sup>86</sup> The numerous examples collected by Hellmut Ritter in the relevant chapters of *Das Meer der Seele*, along with his excellent commentary, show very clearly how important this issue was in Sufi history.

We cannot blame the orthodox who refused to accept the Prophetic tradition: “I saw my Lord in the most beautiful shape” or, even more outspoken, “I saw my Lord as a young man, with his cap awry.”<sup>87</sup> Yet, it was these alleged traditions which inspired Sufi poets to some of their most charming poems. As early as in ‘Aṭṭār’s verse the admiration for the *kach kulāh*, the young coquettish beloved with his silken cap awry occurs,<sup>88</sup> an admiration that has found its most well-known expression in Ḥasan Dihlawī’s (d. 1328) verse:

*Mā qibla rāst kardīm be-samṭ-i kachkulāhī*

We have directed our *qibla* toward the quarter of the one with his cap awry.

Persian and Turkish poetry cannot be understood without this symbolism which led the mystics to see in the youth, preferably fourteen years old, a *shāhid*, a witness of God’s eternal beauty, and which induced them to call him often an idol, *ṣanam* or *but*. The tension between the stern Islamic monotheism on the one hand and the verbal idol-worship of the Sufi poetry on the other gives a very special flavor to the poetical images, especially if we keep in mind that the idol was meant to represent Divine Beauty, *jamāl*, and at the same time God’s *jalāl*, His Majesty. The beloved thus becomes a perfect mirror of the seemingly contrasting attributes of God, attracting the lover by his radiant beauty, but

<sup>84</sup> Cf. L. Massignon, *La Passion d’al-Ḥallāj, martyr mystique de l’Islam* (Paris, 1922), p. 799. Rūzbihān Baqlī, in his *‘Abhar al-‘ashiqīn*, ed. Henri Corbin (Paris and Tehran, 1958), para. 79, says: “The face of Adam is the *qibla* of the lovers.” See also Meier, *Naḡmuddīn al-Kubrā*, p. 221.

<sup>85</sup> Hujwīrī/Nicholson, p. 416.

<sup>86</sup> Abū’l-Qāsim al-Qushairī, *ar-Risāla fī ‘ilm al-taṣawwuf* (Cairo, 1330/1912), p. 9.

<sup>87</sup> See Ritter, *Das Meer der Seele*, pp. 445 ff.

<sup>88</sup> ‘Aṭṭār, *Dīwān-i qāṣa’id wa ghazaliyāt*, ed. Sa’id Nafīsī (Tehran, 1339/1960), p. 26; Ḥasan Dihlawī’s poem in S. M. Ikram, *Armaghān-i Pāk* (Karachi, 1953), p. 135.



submitting him to unending affliction by the manifestations of his whims or his outright cruelty.<sup>89</sup> The whole store of images connected with this aspect of love reflects these two sides; they become particularly clear in the image of the Turk, the cruel, beautiful hero who drags the lover's head through the arena, inflicting wounds on him with arrow and dagger . . . That such a relationship was far from being only a literary device is borne out by the numerous names of Sufis who indulged in *ḥusnparastī*, worship of beauty as revealed in human forms, which entails every kind of suffering and eventually the annihilation of the lover in the beloved. The poets Fakhruddīn 'Irāqī (d. 1289) and Auḥaduddīn Kirmānī (d. 1237) are best-known among them, but one could add hundreds of names, from Sarmad<sup>90</sup> in Mughal India to minor figures whose stories are often extremely weird.

The tension of a person afflicted by such a love could break all limits, and the sources frequently tell of people dying or swooning at the very sight of the beloved or when hearing a single word from him. Fritz Meier relates in this context an interesting story about Abū Sa'īd-i Abū'l-Khair, whose son was the object of a dervish's love. Good psychologist, he asked his son to feed his lover with his own hand and to give him sweetmeat, and the lover, in the explosion of his tension which had been soothed by this gentle act, immediately set out for pilgrimage. Abū Sa'īd sent his son to accompany him, but the dervish, cured by the very touch of the beloved, refused his company.<sup>91</sup>

Rūmī was apparently of a similar opinion, holding that a temporary fulfillment was more practical for a balanced and normal life than endless yearning. He simply put it somewhat more crudely when he was told that Auḥaduddīn Kirmānī's love for young boys was chaste (although he used to tear their frocks during *samā'*,

<sup>89</sup> Schubart's classification (*Religion und Eros*, p. 193) of homoerotic relations as "harmonious, without opaqueness and nightly awe" certainly does not work in the love mysticism of Persian Sufism; there his remark about homoerotic relations as an expression of "hatred of heterosexual love" (p. 194) fits slightly better, though not completely.

<sup>90</sup> For Fakhruddīn 'Irāqī and Auḥaduddīn Kirmānī see E. G. Browne, *A Literary History of Persia*, (Cambridge, 1921) and Jan Rypka, *History of Iranian Literatures* (Dordrecht, 1968). 'Irāqī's charming poetry has been edited by Sa'īd Nafīsī, *Kulliyāt* (Tehran, 1338/1959). For Sarmad see B. A. Hashmi, "Sarmad" in *Islamic Culture* (Hyderabad Deccan, 1933-1934) and every history of Indo-Muslim literature. A particularly strange story about a Sufi who fell in love with a boy is told by Muḥammad A'zam Tattawī, *Tuḥfat al-tāhirīn*, ed. B. A. Durrani (Hyderabad Sind, 1956) p. 112: the boy's father threw the dervish in the Indus, but some time later he was seen, happily riding on the waves, sitting on the millstone which the angry father had fastened around his neck! Poetical models of this relationship are mainly Maḥmūd (of Ghazna) and Ayāz, often praised in lyrics and in a considerable number of epics; Hilālī's *Shāh ū gadā* deals with a similar relationship, that of King and Beggar, frequently mentioned in mystical works such as Aḥmad Ghazzālī's *Sawāniḥ* (ed. Hellmut Ritter [Istanbul, 1942], trans. Richard Gramlich, *Gedanken über die Liebe* [Wiesbaden, 1976]) and related books. Amusing parodies of the style of such homoerotic poems can be found in the Turkish verse of the fifteenth century Bektashi poet Kayḡusuz Abdāl.

<sup>91</sup> Meier, *Abū Sa'īd*, p. 223.

dancing breast to breast with them). Rūmī's short remark about this kind of relation was simple: "*Kāsh kardī u gudhashī*" (Wish he had done it and been done with it!)<sup>92</sup>

But it was not exactly the *kardan u gudhashtan* that these Sufis wanted. For them the ideal was chaste love, as much as the admiration of the unbearded might often have degenerated into sheer pederasty. But the theoreticians of the movement always remained faithful to the alleged Prophetic tradition: "Who loves and remains chaste and dies, dies as a martyr." Rūzbihān Baqlī (d. 1209), whose statements about chaste love are probably the most impressive expressions of this experience (besides the writings of his elder compatriots Aḥmad Ghazzālī and 'Ainulquḍāt Hamadhānī) remarks that "the journey of the lovers is nothing but Reality, and the collyrium of their eyes is only the dust of the street of the *sharī'a*," meaning that their eyes are brightened by the *sharī'a*.<sup>93</sup> At the day of the primordial covenant (Sura 7:171) the souls flew in the world of heavenly love on the wings of human love. That is why Rūzbihān never ceases repeating that *'ishq-i majāzī*, metaphorical, that is, human, love is the ladder that leads toward the love of the Merciful: *al-majāz qanṭarat al-ḥaqīqa*.<sup>94</sup>

For Rūzbihān Baqlī, as for his friends in this school of love, human love means a pedagogic experience. It trains the soul to endure hardships and teaches man absolute obedience to the will of the beloved, and thus prepares him for obedience to God, the highest goal in life.

The reader of Persian mystical and mystically inclined poetry is well aware of the importance given by the writers to the experience of cruelty—Goethe, who had read but little Persian literature in translation, remarked that this cruelty as expressed in the image of ball and polo mallet as metaphors for the lover's head in the beloved's curls is repugnant to our Western taste.<sup>95</sup> But the lover in the traditional strain, who derived his ideals from the *ḥubb 'udhrī* as propounded by the Arabs and particularly as codified by Muḥammad ibn Dā'ūd az-Zāhirī as well as from the Sufi ideal of absolute surrender to the will of God, experienced the longing for pain and the hope for death as a martyr as an essential part of this love.<sup>96</sup>

<sup>92</sup> Jāmī, *Nafahāt al-uns*, p. 461.

<sup>93</sup> Rūzbihān Baqlī, *'Abhar al-'āshiqīn*, para. 112.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid, para. 4; para. 183. See also Rūzbihān Baqlī, *Sharḥ-i shaḥḥiyāt: Les paradoxes des soufis*, ed. Henri Corbin (Tehran and Paris, 1966), chap. 182, para. 571: "Love is the ladder to the pre-eternal roof of *taḥlīd*." See also H. Corbin, "Sympathie et théopathie chez les fidèles d'amour en Islam," *Erano-Jahrbuch*, 24 (1955), 199-301.

<sup>95</sup> In *Noten und Abhandlungen zum West-Östlichen Divan*, s.v. "Despotie".

<sup>96</sup> See the crude line in Amīr Khusrau, *Dīwān-i kāmīl*, ed. M. Darwish (Tehran, 1343/1964), no. 720:

When a lover is killed because of love and passion,  
Then his blood is not the blood of martyrs, but the menstruation of women.



Walter Schubart has correctly classified the close relation among tragic catharsis, mystical ecstasy, and erotic orgiastic rites, all of which aim at an outbreak of accumulated power into freedom.<sup>97</sup> Part of this experience is the polarity of pain and joy which, at the utmost end, become identical:

When pain reaches its limits it becomes remedy,

says Ghālib (d. 1869).<sup>98</sup> The overwhelming strength of the experience of an unfulfilled love manifests itself in longing for death as the only means of being united with the beloved. The Sufis have stressed the importance of dying, of death as a lovely bridge between lover and beloved,<sup>99</sup> and if their asceticism was some kind of sacrifice in order to attain something priceless their wish of sacrificing themselves to the Beloved can be understood as the expression of the hope for complete liberation of the self from the limits of time and space.

The enjoyment of pain, rather the calling for pain, which permeates Sufi lyrics and prayers, is part of this process of liberation, which has unkindly been called "mystical masochism." The motif of the arrow that pierces the lover's body and soul reaches from allusions to it in early Sufi sayings to very concrete descriptions of the pain caused by it in late Sindhi folk poetry.<sup>100</sup> The predilection for the arrow motif may have to do with its underlying sexual symbolism. But we may also think of the numerous allusions to burning,<sup>101</sup> to the capacity of Sufis to inflict burn scars upon themselves without being aware of them, and of the whole imagery of the fire of love which is summed up in the experience that for the true lover, symbolized in Abraham, fire becomes lovely as a rose garden.<sup>102</sup> Perhaps the most outspoken mysticism of pain can be found in the verse of Shāh 'Abdul Laṭīf, the great Sindhi mystical poet of the eighteenth century, whose heroines, the suffering woman-souls, are afflicted with every conceivable pain, wandering through the burning desert heat, being drowned in the river, being tortured by the cruel ruler, and yet they call for more pain:

<sup>97</sup> Schubart, *Religion und Eros*, p. 170.

<sup>98</sup> Mirzā Asadullāh Ghālib, *Urdu Dīwān*, refrain *hōnā*.

<sup>99</sup> For love and death cf. Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions*, p. 135.

<sup>100</sup> For the arrow motif in Shāh 'Abd ul-Laṭīf's poetry see Schimmel, *Pain and Grace* (Leiden, 1976), Part II. One should also think of the vision of St. Teresa and her famous statue by Bernini!

<sup>101</sup> A beautiful description of the "valley of love and its burning fire" in 'Aṭṭār, *Manṭiq uṭ-ṭayr*, ed. M. Jawād Shakūr (Tehran, 1961), p. 222. The instances are too frequent to be enumerated; among them, the "ocean of fire" is most frequently used. Rūmī (*Dīwān*, no. 1657) sings:

The school of education of the lovers is fire,  
I am day and night in this school.

<sup>102</sup> The story of Abraham and the rose garden was developed from Sura 21:70 and forms one of the favorite topics of Persian poetry.

Let the knife be blunt that I may feel your hand longer!<sup>103</sup>

This cry of the tortured human being is repeated time and again, and we may remember in this connection that according to the school of Ḥallāj and his followers, Iblīs too enjoys being cursed and punished as long as he is sure that God looks at him while punishing him. The identification of the true lover and monotheist with Satan, not rare in medieval and modern writing, is part of this imagery.<sup>104</sup>

The arrow motif as well as the fiery rose garden has led us to the world of symbolic expression of the experience of love in its various shades. Let us examine a few of them more closely.

Which lover in Persian poetry would not complain that his soul has come to his lips, that is, that he is on the point of dying, and that the beloved should grant him a kiss to quicken him? The idea of the kiss as an exchange of souls goes back to classical antiquity and has often been used by the poets of Greece and Rome, and by those in Europe who were acquainted with their works.<sup>105</sup> (The symbol of the Holy Spirit as the kiss between the Father and the Son in Greek Christian theology belongs here, too.<sup>106</sup>). Islam took over this imagery which was eased by the Koranic remarks about God's breathing into Adam in order to make him alive (Sura 15:29; 37:72), and also about the life-bestowing breath of Jesus (Sura 3:49; 5:110). Thus the kiss as the most tender expression of divine grace and inspiration offered itself comfortably to the Sufis. Even kissing the black stone of the Ka'ba might become a symbol for a higher reality, that is the real kiss, and thus, for inspiration, as in Rūmī's charming verse:

The pilgrim kisses the black stone from his innermost heart,  
Because he feels the lips of his beloved in it.<sup>107</sup>

Related to this motif of the exchange of souls and the giving of life by means of a kiss is the motif of the reed flute which, touched by the lips of the beloved, is able to speak:

<sup>103</sup> Shāh 'Abdul Latīf, *Risāla*, Sur Yaman Kalyān II, 12.

<sup>104</sup> For this problem cf. Schimmel, *Pain and Grace*, pp. 210 ff.

<sup>105</sup> For the meaning of kissing cf. F. Heiler, *Erscheinungsformen und Wesen der Religion* (Stuttgart, 1961), pp. 321 ff.; A. Schimmel, "Kuss," in *Die Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart* (3d ed.; Tübingen, 1957-1965), IV, 189 f. Besides such classical authors as Petronius and Catullus we find the motif also in John Donne's poetry ("So, so break off this last lamenting kiss") and in German classicism. The exchange of kisses in the church, the *philema hagion*, belongs here as much as does the widespread motif in legends and fairy tales that tell either of quickening by means of a kiss, or of God's taking away a saint's soul (e.g., Moses) by means of a kiss.

<sup>106</sup> Cf. E. Segelberg, "The Coptic-Gnostic Gospel According to Philip and Its Sacramental System," in *Numen* (Leiden), 7 (1960), 189 ff.

<sup>107</sup> *Dīwān* no. 617.



If I would be joined to the breath of some companion,  
I would say everything that has to be said!<sup>108</sup>

The favorite worship of the Sufis, the nightly prayer, was likewise connected with the imagery of love mysticism: a *ḥadīth qudsī* makes God say: "He is a liar who claims to love Me, and when night falls he sleeps away from Me."<sup>109</sup>

The sweetness of union during the *munājāt*, the nightly orison, has often been described, and Dhū'n-Nūn's exclamation: "In the crowd I call Thee 'O Lord!', but in loneliness I call Thee 'O Beloved!'"<sup>110</sup> points well to the experience of loving union during the lonely hours of the night when the soul receives the kiss of grace and touches the garment of the divine beloved.

It may seem amazing that even in a traditional setting where woman was usually referred to in rather deprecatory remarks a kind of bridal mysticism could develop. An early Sufi said: "The saints are God's brides, but only the close ones (*maḥram*) can see the brides," for God is jealous of them, and not everyone has access to them.<sup>111</sup> Rūmī, on the other hand, may compare the mystical state (*ḥāl*) to the unveiling of the bride and the longer lasting station (*maqām*) to the intimate time that the king enjoys with his bride in seclusion.<sup>112</sup> The numerous puns of the "virgins," that is, "deeper meaning," which should be given in marriage to the "bridegroom," namely the "word," belong here too; they are used, for instance, in the beginning of Aḥmad Ghazzālī's *Sawānīḥ* and in other mystical works.

Classical Islam had one symbol of the longing woman soul in the figure of Potiphar's wife, Zulaikhā, who, however, became "purified" only in the Persian tradition. She is a noble model of the soul that is infatuated by the Divine Beauty, and the Koranic tale that the women who gazed at Joseph did not feel that they cut their hands instead of cutting the fruit (Sura 12:31) fits well into the general scheme of suffering in love without really being aware of it. A certain use of the feminine address to the loving soul in Niffarī's lyrics notwithstanding, it was only in one part of the Muslim world where an exact parallel to Christian bridal mysticism developed. That was in Indo-Pakistan.<sup>113</sup> The Indian tradition of the *gopis* as Lord Krishna's playmates has certainly contributed to the development of

<sup>108</sup> *Mathnawī*, I, 27.

<sup>109</sup> Hujwīrī/Nicholson, p. 352; see also *Mathnawī*, I, 1989 ff. and Commentary, VII, p. 155.

<sup>110</sup> Abū Nu'aim al-Iṣfahānī, *Ḥilyat al-auliya'* (Cairo, 1932 f.), IX, 332.

<sup>111</sup> *Mathnawī*, I, 428.

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.*, line 1435.

<sup>113</sup> Niffarī addresses his soul in some of his poems as *yā bunayyati*, "Oh my little daughter" (See P. Nwyia, *Trois oeuvres inédites des mystiques musulmans: Šaqlq al-Balḥī, Ibn 'Ata', Niffarī* [Beirut, 1973]). For the whole problem see Schimmel, *Pain and Grace*, Part II, and idem, "Sindhi Literature," in J. Gonda, *History of Indian Literature*, Vol. VIII, 4 (Wiesbaden, 1974).

this image. It could also logically develop out of the image of the *nafs* as feminine: she now is no longer exclusively the *nafs ammāra*, the soul that incites evil (Sura 12:53), as is usually the case in classical Sufism, but develops through endless suffering into the *nafs lawwāma* (Sura 75:2) and finally becomes the *nafs muṭma'inna* (Sura 89:28), the "soul at peace" which can return to her Lord. The idea that God is able to cover the "naked" disgraced woman with His grace, an allusion to His name *as-Sattār*, is very helpful in this connection, and the Pakistani poets in the regional languages have most skillfully employed tales about brave and suffering women as they existed in the country to represent the soul on her various states of development until union is finally achieved. Sasuī who died in wandering, Sohnī who died in drowning, Hīr and many others represent the fullness of mystical experience in the imagery of longing and yearning, of being punished for faithlessness, or for having indulged in the "sleep of heedlessness." In this poetry, the bridegroom is either the Lord Himself or, sometimes, the Prophet Muḥammad, for the later mystics hoped for union with the *ḥaqīqa muḥammadiyya*, the archetypal Muḥammad. Interestingly the same imagery has been taken over by the Isma'ili pirs in their *ginans*, the devotional songs that follow exactly the same pattern, only with the Imām as "heavenly bridegroom."<sup>114</sup> The development of these ideas could be helped by the use of an alleged Prophetic tradition, which was already quoted by Ghazzālī in the chapter on marriage in the *Iḥyā' 'ulūm ad-dīn*: "If it were permitted that one should prostrate before anyone but God I would order that wives should prostrate before their husbands."<sup>115</sup> The transition from such a saying to the application of the husband-wife symbol to God and the soul was, then, very easy.

The mystics did not hesitate to express their hope for complete union in very direct language. When Rūmī takes over Sanā'ī's lines "I do not sleep with such an idol in a nightshirt,"<sup>116</sup> he points to the necessity of complete denudation in front of the beloved. This imagery is not rare in his poetry. He asks the beloved to tear the garment off his body, and he wants to be embraced by the embrace of divine grace.<sup>117</sup> Similar expressions had been used by his father who spoke of "sitting in the lap of Grace"<sup>118</sup> and compared the relation of man and God to that of a loving

<sup>114</sup> See Ali S. Asani, "The Motif of the Longing Soul in Ismā'īlī *ginan* Literature," Honors' thesis, Harvard University, 1977.

<sup>115</sup> Al-Ghazzālī, *Iḥyā*, II, 53; quoted also by Nāṣir Muḥammad 'Andalīb, *Nāla-yi 'Andalīb* (2 vols.; Bhopal, 1309/1891), I, 578.

<sup>116</sup> *Mathnawī*, I, 138; taken from Sanā'ī, *Dīwān*, ed. Mudarris Razawī (Tehran, 1341/1962), p. 488.

<sup>117</sup> Thus *Dīwān*, no. 551:

I am better with you naked, I take off the dress of the body,  
So that the lap of your grace becomes a gown for my soul.

Further *Dīwān*, no. 2063, and in a more metaphorical sense *Dīwān*, nos. 314, 2555.

<sup>118</sup> Bahā'uddīn Walad, *Ma'ārif*, IV, 28.



couple who see each other's most private parts and yet enjoy each other; thus the soul stands before God, naked, blushing partly from fear and partly from love, and waiting for his order,<sup>119</sup> for, as the Sufis of old said: "When love becomes perfect the conditions of etiquette disappear."<sup>120</sup> And Bahā'uddīn Walad tells that he said to God: "I am complaining like the loving bride, O God, do not deprive me of thy taste!"<sup>121</sup> One of the most outspoken remarks in this respect is found in Nāṣir Muḥammad 'Andalīb's (d. 1758 in Delhi) *Nāla-i 'Andalīb*, where he goes into the details of the love relationship between the maiden soul and her divine beloved: when the bride all of a sudden, after much pining and longing, experiences in the consummation of marriage the piercing of her body she is shocked; but the beloved consoles her by telling her that after showing his *jamāl*, his beauty and kindness, he has to show her his *jalāl*, his power and majesty (which is even more divine), and that this wounding of her body is nothing but the sign of highest love, of "naked union." All the motifs known from the earlier sources, longing, the twofold aspect of the divine beloved, the arrow motif, the necessity of suffering, nay, rather suffering as the fulfillment of love, are here harmoniously blended.<sup>122</sup>

It goes without saying that mystics who used the image of union so often and almost without restriction were also aware of the logical consequences, the pregnancy of the soul. This image is known to hellenistic mystics such as Plotinus and Origen, and the metaphor is not unusual in Christian mysticism (Meister Eckhart's "birth of Christ in the soul" comes to mind), either in a more abstract sense or in the very matter-of-fact fantasies of medieval nuns.<sup>123</sup> Of the Muslim mystical poets Rūmī, again, is most outspoken. Although he has a few descriptions of pregnancy with all its signs,<sup>124</sup> he usually sees the body as pregnant with the soul or the heart, or the soul as pregnant with the light of God's majesty. His numerous allusions to Mary, who represents the body, and Christ, the symbol of the soul which has to be born in everybody, belong to this tradition and are very close to medieval Christian ideas. In one place he even sees the spirit impregnating the body so that it can bring forth the burden of daily religious and secular works.<sup>125</sup> The imagery of the "alchemical marriage," though barely mentioned by mystical poets in Islam, may belong to this group of symbols; the

<sup>119</sup> Ibid., p. 139 f.

<sup>120</sup> Abū Nu'aim al-Iṣfahānī, *Hilya*, X, 288.

<sup>121</sup> Bahā'uddīn Walad, *Ma'ārif*, IV, 18, where also some other very strange remarks about sex and adultery can be found. Rūmī has likewise some verses about the Arabic saying: "If you commit adultery, then with a free woman," *Mathnawī*, I, 2805.

<sup>122</sup> 'Andalīb, *Nāla-yi 'Andalīb*, I, 560.

<sup>123</sup> Heiler, *Erscheinungsformen*, pp. 246 f.

<sup>124</sup> Realistic descriptions: *Dīwān*, nos. 3070, 3090; "The body is pregnant from the soul..." No. 2285; further No. 2234. "Everything under the sky is a mother of some sort," *Mathnawī*, III, 3362-3363; cf. also ibid., I, 399.

<sup>125</sup> See also *Fīhi mā fīhi*, trans. Arberry, p. 33.

raw material of the soul is transformed into something higher by union with some mysterious substance. One should perhaps follow the traces of those Sufis who were credited with alchemistic activities, such as Ja'far as-Şādiq and Dhū'n-Nūn, and it seems more than an accident that Rūmī married his beloved Shams-i Tabrīzī to a girl called Kīmīyā.

It is also Rūmī to whom we owe a rather dramatic description of the *hieros gamos*, where he sees himself as the earth and the beloved as the sky; with parched lips he waits for the rain of grace so that the earth may flourish with roses and gardens. But how could the earth know what is growing in her womb? God who has put the burden into her is the one who knows it best. Is not every atom pregnant with a different secret of God so that even out of these wombs the cries *ana'l-ḥaqq*, "I am the Absolute Truth," and *subḥānī*, "Praise be to me!" can emerge?<sup>126</sup>

In Rūmī this imagery leads logically to the imagery of children and their development until they, learning first metaphorical love by playing with dolls, eventually become acquainted in the fiery school of real love with the goal of life, and thus the imagery swings full circle.

There are still other areas that belong to the border zones between the erotic in the widest sense of the word and Sufi life. Schubart has rightly remarked that in ecstatic rapture the "word becomes song, the step becomes dance,"<sup>127</sup> and Goethe spoke of

Das Doppelglück der Töne und der Liebe.

Taken from this viewpoint the numerous warnings of the sterner Sufis, let alone the orthodox, against the practices of *samā'* can be understood even better. It was not only the aversion of the sober to music and dance, but rather the perfectly correct feeling that in music and dance powers are at work which belong to that dangerous, uncontrollable zone of eros which the pious had to avoid or, at best, to strictly regulate. Indeed, the tearing of the garments of the dancers is one of the most objectionable aspects of Sufism and Sufi dance. Further, many a Sufi deemed the presence of a beautiful boy necessary for a perfect performance of *samā'*.<sup>128</sup> Again, Rūmī appears as an outstanding interpreter of these feelings in their totality: he who had given up his reputation for the sake of his love for Shamsuddīn and had begun to write poetry, to sing and whirl around in this frenzied love, has the richest possible imagery in musical terms. In addition there are the numerous ghazals that describe the *samā'* as a ladder to heaven or even as the force which originated with the first signs of life and which permeates

<sup>126</sup> *Dīwān*, no. 3048.

<sup>127</sup> Schubart, *Religion und Eros*, p. 139.

<sup>128</sup> Cf. Hellmut Ritter's description of the *samā'* in "Die Mevlānafeier in Konya vom 11. bis 17. Dezember 1960," *Oriens*, 15 (1960), 249-270.



everything created from the atom to the divine Throne.<sup>129</sup> The connection of the flute with the breathing and the kiss, that is, the feeling of being quickened by divine grace, plays an important role in this connection. Or we may think of the image of the harp, an instrument that is caressed by the player's fingers and thus represents the lover's body longing for the touch of the beloved to lead him to ecstasy.

In a certain way the imagery of intoxication belongs to the same order. The connection of intoxication and sexual freedom is easily given, and the condemnation of sexual licentiousness and wine in the Koran goes together; but the "spiritual wine" was rediscovered by the Sufis. Intoxication is an important step in the mystical path, although, according to the sober orders, it has to be overcome because it leads to the experience of all-embracing unity (*waḥdat al-wujūd*), to cosmic love in the widest sense. The whole imagery of wine in Persian poetry could be comfortably combined with the love motif by introducing the young charming Zoroastrian or Christian cupbearer as the locus of divine manifestations, which brings us back to the "love of the unbearded."

Much rarer is the symbolism of sacred food in Islamic mysticism. To my knowledge the idea of taking the beloved into one's self (the *theophagia* of Christian theology), or to have communion with him, is barely mentioned; it would be worthwhile to look at the very extensive imagery of food in Rūmī's poetry from this angle. His use of the numerous allusions to *ḥalwā*, sweetmeats representing the sweetness of the beloved's lips, or the sweetness of God's grace, certainly is part of this group of border images.<sup>130</sup> And maybe we can also explain from this viewpoint Rūmī's predilection for the use of *bū*, "fragrance, scent," which is so ubiquitous in his verse. Although in general Islamic lore scent is connected with the scent of Joseph's healing shirt (Sura 12:94 ff.) we cannot overlook Rūmī's verse in which he says:

Who was yesterday your friend and bedfellow  
That the hot bath became full of musk due to his fragrance?<sup>131</sup>

Instances of similar lines could easily be multiplied.

The orthodox certainly approved neither of the practices nor of the poetical symbols of the Sufis. Schubart states that the further man is removed from the origins of religion the more he will deprive religion of its eerie, weird, and

<sup>129</sup> For the whole imagery see Schimmel, *The Triumphal Sun*, Part II, chap. 15.

<sup>130</sup> A charming combination of food-and-kiss imagery in a verse by the Indian mystic Gēsūdarāz (d. 1422) (*Anīs al-'ushshāq* [n.p., n.d.], p. 87):

Two three kisses, light, with a soft little biting—  
We'll be like sugar and *palūda* [a kind of pudding].

<sup>131</sup> *Dīwān*, no. 2409.

frightful aspects until religion is dissolved into ethics, and the Holy becomes Moral Perfection.<sup>132</sup> The Sufis experienced time and again the *Urschauer*, the primordial rapture of love which they date back to the day of the Covenant, the *rūz-i alast*. They experienced it in a mixture of fascination and awe, whether this love was purely "divine" or grew in connection with a human object. They went back beyond the institutionalized, rigorously legalistic framework of orthodox Islam into that darkness where the true Water of Life can be found.

The Sufis found various answers to the experience of the *Urschauer*: for some of them it proved too strong, and they tried to eliminate it completely by embarking on the hardest ascetic practices possible. Others gave themselves to music and dance, or even to limitless debauchery, obliterating the outward signs of established religion, thus following the example of Majnūn, the prototype of the frenzied lover who died in the desert far away from the city of reason. Or else they sublimated their overwhelming experience into a symbolic language which, even when watered down by frequent use in subsequent generations, still makes the reader feel how deeply spiritually shaken they were by the experience of the Holy, which can never be expressed in words but only in suffering. As Ghālib says, alluding to Ḥallāj's martyrdom for his alleged divulgence of the secret of divine love:

The secret which is in the breast is not a sermon:  
You can say it on the gallows, but not on the pulpit.<sup>133</sup>

<sup>132</sup> Schubart, *Religion und Eros*, p. 10.

<sup>133</sup> Mirzā Asadullāh Ghālib, *Dīwān-i fārsī, Kulliyāt* (17 vols.; Lahore, 1969), IV, No. 83.





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